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THE FRISCO SHARPER'S COOL HAND.



WHEN HE FINALLY OPENED HIS EYES HE FOUND THE OLD HAG BENDING OVER HIM.

The Frisco Sharper's Cool Hand;

OR,

ROUTING the ROOKERY CROOKS.

THE MYSTERY OF THE

Crewless Craft of Burling Slip.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.

HIDDEN BY THE NIGHT.

VERY near the point where West Eighth street makes an abrupt bend and continuing toward North River, becomes Fourteenth street, in that antique portion of the city known as Greenwich Village, stands an old house which has the appearance of being a relic of a bygone and forgotten generation.

It stands with one corner to the street and back some thirty paces from the sidewalk. The narrow, brick-paved little court in front is hampered on one side by a great, grim, shuttered warehouse, and on the other by a towering apartment-house, each of which seems to look down upon its old-fashioned neighbor as a rich upstart is wont to look upon a shabby old gentleman who has seen better days.

It is one of the old time three-story houses, with a high stoop and dingy green shutters, the latter always closed. Indeed, but for one circumstance it might be supposed that the house was vacant, and this was the fact that an old man was seen leaving the place early in the morning and sometimes seen returning late in the evening. He was always alone, was never known to speak to any one in the neighborhood, and looked about as rusty and out of place in this generation as the old house itself.

In short, such was the mystery surrounding both the rookery and the old man, that the curiosity with which the people of the neighborhood had for a time regarded them, had long since given place to awe, and in some cases fear.

So far as anybody knew neither had ever been guilty of wrong-doing—the man of committing, or the house of harboring a crime. But that made no difference to the gossips. They knew nothing to the contrary, and preferred to think there was some awful crime concealed by the mystery hanging about both house and man.

Thus matters stood when, toward the close of a dreary day in late autumn, a gentleman was passing the house and was attracted, first by the appearance of the quaint looking old man and, second, by a small knot of people of various ages and conditions, who had evidently collected for the purpose of watching for the old man's coming, and now watched him as he made his way with quick, nervous steps across the little court toward the high stoop, with the wild staring eyes and pallid cheeks with which they might have looked upon a ghost.

The gentleman's curiosity was instantly aroused.

He paused and gazed alternately at the strange old man and at his group of watchers, until the former had disappeared into the old house, and he noticed that during all this time not a soul among the group, who stood huddled together like frightened partridges, had dared to utter a syllable until the old man's disappearance, when they at once sent up a chatter in subdued voices.

At length, addressing himself to one of the most intelligent of the group, he asked:

"What's the excitement, now?"

The person addressed was a square-shouldered young man with an athletic figure, and a rather good-looking, determined face, and was consequently the least intimidated by the appearance of the mysterious old personage who had just entered the house. Indeed there was a good deal of the swagger about the young man, and it was not hard to see that he was just the individual to pose as the champion of his set in a rough and tumble.

"Excitement?" cried the young man, taking a step nearer the questioner, and speaking in a confidential air. "See de ole bloke w'ot jes' went in?"

"Yes," replied the gentleman.

"Wal, he's w'ot we call de 'Shadder' roun' dese corners."

"The Shadow?"

"Dat's right."

"Why do you call him that?"

"I'll tell ye. Ye see de ole barnacle's been mosyin' about, goin' in an' comin' outen dat ole joint fer de las' year, an' in all dat time he's never spoke to nobody, an' dey ain't a person in the neighborhood w'ot even knows his name, or w'ot he does, an' we all t'ink he's up to no good. See?"

"Who occupies the house?"

"Nobuddy as far as anybody knows, 'cept the ole party hisself, an' dat's w'ot puzzles us. We t'ink he's up to some crook deviltry."

The gentleman laughed.

"You are probably mistaken about that," he said. "In my opinion he is some harmless old chap who has taken up his quarters in this out-of-the-way old house for the quiet and privacy it affords."

"Dat's all right," retorted the young man scornfully, "but w'ot's de use of a man goin' 'bout like dat widout speakin' to nobody? I believe he's crooked, an' dat's what all de folks 'round here t'inks."

With that the young man swaggered off, and pretty soon the knot of curious people gradually dispersed, and left the gentleman the only watcher.

His curiosity was too much aroused to allow him to tear himself away at once. Besides he had another interest aside from curiosity in the matter.

The hint thrown out by the young man, although apparently scouted by the gentleman, had gone deeper than he cared to reveal.

There might, after all, be some foundation for the suspicion, and he—it may as well be known at the outset—being no other than the famous detective, Thaddeus Burr, he felt a deeper interest in the matter than mere curiosity.

It was rapidly approaching nightfall and was already growing quite dusk, and yet no light appeared in any part of the old house.

After waiting for fully a half-hour for the appearance of a light or some sign of life, the detective finally decided to investigate.

He crossed the little court, ascended the high stoop and rung the bell.

There was no response, and he rung a second time.

After waiting for considerable time the door was opened so quietly that he could not imagine any human being had approached it, and a figure so diminutive in size that he mistook it for a child of not more than three years old, stood before him.

But when the little being spoke the detective was still more astonished, for the voice was like that of a large man, and Burr strained his eyes to discern the little creature, who was scarcely visible in the thick gloom of the unlighted hall.

"What do you want?" came the stentorian voice of the little man.

As soon as the detective recovered sufficiently from his astonishment to speak, he replied:

"I wish to ask if a Mr. Morgan lives here."

"No, he doesn't," growled the little man, and was about to close the door, when Burr interrupted him by saying:

"Is the old gentleman in?"

"What old gentleman?" demanded the dwarf sharply.

"I forget his name, although I know it well enough. He came in here just now. I was thinking his name was Morgan."

The little man emerged a little from the gloom, and the detective could then see enough of him to discern that he was apparently a man of over fifty, with a long gray beard, but was not more than three feet tall.

After scanning the detective from head to foot he finally replied in a dogged voice:

"The party you want is old Murdock, I guess."

"Yes, that's the man," exclaimed Burr, eagerly catching at the bait. "Where is he?"

"He's not here."

"He was here a moment ago."

"I know he was, but he is not here now."

"Where is he?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

And again the little man essayed to shut the door, but Burr caused him to hesitate by asking the question:

"When will he be likely to return?"

"I don't know," was the curt response, and the door banged shut in the detective's face.

The latter, having no time to spare for further investigation just then, turned, and descending the stoop, was soon in the street again.

An appointment called him down in the vicinity of Fulton Market, and walking until he came across a cab, engaged it and had himself driven down-town.

There had been a robbery the night previous in a jewelry store near the corner of Fulton and South streets, and Superintendent Byrnes had detailed Thad Burr to look into the matter, and to this place he had gone.

The business of gathering the necessary facts to start upon the case detained him upward of an hour, and when he emerged from the store it had begun to rain. It was one of those steady, sullen rains, chill and penetrating, and appeared to have set in for the night.

The darkness was intense, and the few street lights in this locality flickered dimly in the dreary gloom.

Burr was compelled to make a call on Burling Slip, and thither he picked his way, struggling manfully to keep an umbrella over him amid the fitful gusts of wind which came skurrying around corners.

By this time Burling Slip was deserted, save for an occasional belated truckman, and the prospect was even more dreary than the one he had left.

Along the slippery sidewalk toward Pearl street he made his way as rapidly as it was possible under the circumstances, his mind about equally divided between the business of the jewelry store robbery and the mysterious old house in Greenwich Village and its equally mysterious tenants.

So deeply absorbed was he with these two perplexing questions, that he had forgotten his own whereabouts and surroundings, until he was suddenly recalled to his senses by a startling occurrence.

The detective had suddenly struck his foot against something in the darkness which caused him to stop with a shudder of horror.

It was too dark to see what the object was, but instinct, born of long experience, told him what it was.

Still, he was not satisfied until he had taken out his dark-lantern, gone into a doorway and lighted it and, returning to the spot, flashed the light over the ghastly object which the night had hidden from view.

As he had already guessed, it was the form of a man, and it did not require many seconds' investigation to discover that the man had been murdered and that so recently that he was still warm.

The man was well dressed, and the presence of a heavy watch-chain and divers other pieces of jewelry appeared to attest the double fact that the man had been well to do and that either the murder had not been committed for the purpose of robbery or the murderer had been frightened away from his victim before he had had time to accomplish his object.

"This is a pretty comment upon the vigilance of our police, that this man should have been brutally murdered in so public a place not more than two hours after dark!" mused the detective. "I wonder if one of them can be found within ten blocks of here!"

As he concluded his soliloquy he straightened up and endeavored to penetrate the gloom with his keen eye with a view to discovering a policeman somewhere in the distance.

Not a soul could be seen, and when he paused to listen not the sound of a footstep could be heard.

"This won't do," he muttered to himself. "I must find some one to take charge of this poor fellow."

With that he turned upon his heel with a view to retracing his steps in the direction of South street, when he was startled at coming face to face with a man who had evidently just arrived on the scene.

Burr raised his lantern to scan the new-

comer's face, when to his utter astonishment, he found it to be the identical Shadow, so-called, whom he had seen enter the mysterious old house in Greenwich Village!

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

THE detective was too much astonished at sight of the old man to speak for a moment, and could do nothing but stand and stare at him, and the old man returned the stare with apparently an equal degree of surprise.

And somehow Burr could not avoid associating the old man with the murder.

Neither spoke, and after staring at the detective for a few seconds the old man's eyes reverted to the object on the ground at his feet, only an outline of which could now be discerned, as the halo of the lamp was turned in another direction.

He evidently saw enough, however, to know what it was, for he started convulsively, while his face became a picture of horror.

"Wha—what's that?" he gasped, in a terrified tone.

By way of answer the detective turned the glare of the lamp on the ghastly upturned face, meanwhile taking note of the effect upon that of the old man.

He saw nothing but terror mingled with horror.

"My God!" groaned the old man. "What is this?"

"Don't you see?" asked the detective, coolly, and watched the effect of his words.

"I see that—that—"

"There has been a murder—a horrible murder," interposed Burr.

"Yes—yes, so it seems. But—"

He paused, and the bent frame was convulsed with a shiver as if he had been seized with a chill.

"But what?" demanded the detective severely.

"I—I—wonder who—" stammered the Shadow.

"That is what I should like to know," again interrupted the detective, "and I shall find out before many hours. Mind that!"

This was uttered in a menacing tone.

Burr had a motive for this.

He may have jumped at conclusions, but circumstances had combined to strengthen his first suspicions of the mysterious old man, and his utterance, if not prompted by a full conviction of his guilt, was at least stimulated by a strong suspicion of it.

The old man turned his scared face for a single instant toward the detective, and then faltered:

"I hope so."

And then without another word, dodged aside and shuffled away into the darkness.

Burr gazed after him as long as an outline of him was visible, deeply impressed with the man's strange actions.

"If that old chap doesn't know something about this affair, I'm no judge of human nature," he muttered to himself. "I'll just follow him up and see where he goes."

With that he started in pursuit.

At the corner of the next street he found a policeman, and after briefly notifying him of his find, the detective hurried on.

The fugitive had by this time gained so much distance on him that it was impossible to guess which way he had gone.

He kept on up John street at a venture, however, walking at a rapid pace.

After continuing in this direction for the distance of a block or so, he stopped and listened.

The sound of footsteps not far in advance could be heard, and the detective hurried on.

Another block was covered, and he found himself so close upon the heels of his fugitive as to be able to see who he was.

It was not the old man at all.

With a deep sense of disappointment he retraced his steps, and a few moments later found himself at the corner of the street where the old man seemed to have vanished.

This time he chose Pearl street, and increased his pace as he started along that narrow thoroughfare.

He kept up his gait for a couple of blocks and again paused to listen.

He had not done so for more than a few seconds when the sound of voices caught his ear.

The speakers were not far off and appeared to be speaking in subdued tones.

Following the direction of the voices and stealing noiselessly along, he was soon gratified to find himself within a few paces of the speakers.

They were concealed by the darkness of and sheltered from the storm by the recess of a doorway.

There chancing to be another doorway but a few feet away, the detective crept into it, which he succeeded in doing without attracting the attention of the parties in the other doorway.

From this point he could hear every word that passed between the speakers.

"Who was he?" were the first words he caught.

"I don't know," was the reply.

The cracked voice and quavering tones of the last speaker were too familiar to the detective for him to be mistaken.

It was undoubtedly the old man.

"And yet you say you have seen him before," pursued the first speaker.

"Yes, once."

"Where?"

"In front of my house."

"When?"

"Late this afternoon, just as I was going in."

"What was he doing there?"

"Watching, like all the other curious people about there. They have got to watching me lately as if I were a curiosity of some kind."

"Do you imagine he suspected anything?"

"I'm inclined to believe he did."

"Why?"

"From his actions."

"What did he do that differed from the others?"

"Why, he continued to hang about the place after the others had dispersed, and finally went to the door and rung the bell, a thing none of them has ventured to do since I went there."

"Well?"

"When Carlin went to the door this fellow asked for me."

"He told him you were out, of course?"

"Yes."

"And this leads you to believe that he is a detective?"

"Why not?"

"It is possible that the fellow might have had some other reason for wishing to see you."

"Hardly. Besides, if he had not known something what could have brought him to this part of the town just at the wrong time?"

"That is a little puzzling. It might have been a coincidence, however."

"That is hardly likely. Besides, what could have been his reason for speaking to me and looking at me in the manner he did? He looked at me as much as to say 'you are the man!'"

The other laughed.

It was a hearty, good-natured laugh, and it was difficult to reconcile it with that of a criminal.

Moreover, that, no less than his conversation, showed him to be a very young man.

"A guilty conscience, you know!" he laughed.

"No, I am sure that was not what caused me to think he suspected me," muttered the old man. "There was no mistaking his tone and the expression of his face."

"Well," mused the other more seriously, "you may be right, and if you are, we'll have to play our cards pretty fine to beat him, that's all. But let us be going. The boys will be waiting for us."

The old man made no reply, and Burr heard them leave the doorway and shuffle away in the darkness.

He followed close upon their heels, but not close enough for them to suspect that they were being shadowed.

They went in the direction of Burling Slip.

It was so dark in Pearl street that the detective was unable to distinguish either of the men until they reached the slip.

Here they turned toward the river and a

light on the corner revealed something of their personality.

He saw that he had not been mistaken with regard to the old man, and scarcely less so with regard to the other.

The latter was not only a young man, but he was a powerfully built individual with a broad, good-natured face which would never have been taken for that of a criminal.

He wore a perpetual smile, and was the last man that even the sagacious detective would have selected as a person capable of wrong doing.

He was well-dressed which, added to his refined conversation, indicated that he was a man of good breeding, and Burr could not but wonder how he came to be mixed up in an affair of this kind.

But, he reflected as he followed them along the slip, after all, this was consistent with the fact of the murdered man not being robbed.

The deed had evidently been committed out of revenge.

Meanwhile the rascals kept their course in the direction of the river till they reached South street, and here they turned toward the lower end of the island.

Continuing in this course, they were not long in reaching Old Slip at the foot of which a great number of canal boats were moored.

Here the men turned toward the river again.

Picking their way along the pier among the heaps of freight, they at length reached the end of it.

Jumping from the pier to the deck of one of the canal boats, they made their way across it and leaped to the deck of the next one, and so on until they had crossed half a dozen, when they reached the boat nearest the breakwater on the other side of the slip.

The hull of this craft appeared to be that of an ordinary canal boat, but instead of the customary cabin there was a structure resembling a small cottage or hut, of an oblong shape and having a sloping roof similar to a house.

Light shone from a number of windows along the side, indicating that the novel cabin was already tenanted.

The two men lost no time in jumping down upon the narrow guard which ran along the gunwales, and opening a door, disappeared into the cabin.

Burr had watched the proceeding from the pier, and as soon as the men disappeared he made his way across the flotilla of boats the same as they had done, until he reached the boat nearest to the strange craft.

The sound of lively conversation, mingled with occasional peals of laughter and the clinking of glasses told him that whoever the occupants were they were evidently having a good time.

The detective was in a quandary.

He was anxious to discover who these people were and what they were doing.

But how was this to be done?

After some moments' reflection, he jumped down upon the guard.

The windows were all frosted so that no view of the inside could be had.

Neither could he make out anything that was being said, although he could still hear the sound of voices.

With the hope of discovering some opening by which he could catch a glimpse of the interior he walked to the bow of the boat, across the bow to the opposite guard and started along this toward the stern again.

About the middle of the boat one or two of the windows appeared to be open, and toward them he made his way.

He was not mistaken.

Two of the windows were open.

Approaching the first one cautiously, he peeped in.

The sight astonished him.

The place was as light as day from a number of lights suspended from the ceiling, and a long table traversed the cabin for more than half its length.

Along this were stretched no less than half a dozen nude corpses, but not a living soul was to be seen!

CHAPTER III.

THE CREWLESS CRAFT.

THE detective was at a loss to understand what had become of the merry crowd he had

heard reveling a moment before, especially as he seemed to be able to see the whole of the interior of the boat.

Nevertheless, he had no doubt that they had some place of concealment somewhere about the craft.

But what puzzled him was how they had managed to reach this place of concealment as quickly and why they had concealed themselves.

If it was on account of his approach, how had they received warning of his coming, and why had so many men, as he imagined there were, run from one man?

While these puzzling questions were passing through his mind he was vainly endeavoring to catch sight of some living being in the cabin, by putting his head inside the window and scanning the spacious apartment from end to end.

At length he decided to go in and make a thorough investigation, but before doing so he thought it might be as well to make another tour of the guards and see if he could hear anything from the opposite side, where he had heard the sounds of merriment before.

Accordingly he walked around to the other side.

When he reached the point at which he had jumped down upon the guards he was astonished to hear the same sounds of talking and laughter he had heard before.

He was astounded.

It was inconceivable how they could have returned from their concealment to the cabin in so short a time.

He paused to listen.

There could be no doubt about their being in the very place into which he had been looking a moment before, and he felt sure that if he were back to the window again he would be able to see them.

In order that the men might not have time to escape him this time, he hastened back with all the speed he could command.

In less than a minute he was again at the window on the other side of the boat.

He took no precaution to conceal himself this time, and put his head in at the window as soon as he arrived on the spot.

But what was his surprise and consternation to find the same state of affairs he had found before.

There was not a living soul in sight!

The dead bodies were still there, and everything else was just as it had been before.

Burr concluded to waste no more time in speculation this time, and climbed in through the window.

A brief survey of the cabin told him that there was not a hammock or other sleeping contrivance about the place.

And he was not long in seeing that there was no such thing as a state-room.

He also saw that the floor of the cabin was too near the bottom of the boat to permit of another apartment below it.

Nevertheless, he was not satisfied until he had traversed the entire length of the cabin and surveyed every inch of it.

But at the end of it all he was forced to the conclusion that there was nobody there.

But whence came the voices he had heard? Burr had had many strange experiences during his career as a detective, but this beat them all.

He could make nothing out of it.

Finally he gave it up and started to leave the place.

But just as he reached the guards again an idea occurred to him.

The two rascals had evidently known that he was following them and had used this boat as a means of escape. That is, they had not remained on board, but had merely passed through it and taken another, smaller boat on the other side, in which they had made their escape.

But while this theory appeared to be feasible, how was he to account for the sounds of laughing and talking?

That was the puzzling point, and had the detective been the least inclined toward superstition he must have believed there was something supernatural about it.

As it was, he was satisfied there was some trick of purely human invention, and believed he would in time be able to solve the mystery, but for the present he would be

compelled to leave it unsolved while he fulfilled his other engagement.

Burr walked around the guard to the side of the boat where he had boarded it and at which point he had heard the voices, but all was quiet now.

He stood listening for some time, but not a sound reached his ear, although the light still shone from the windows of the cabin.

The detective climbed upon the deck of the next boat with a view to returning to the pier, and just as he regained his feet he became conscious of the presence of a man who was standing on the deck of the boat on to which he had climbed.

The darkness prevented the detective from seeing more than a vague outline of the man, but he could see that the latter was watching him intently.

Burr's first impulse was to push on past the fellow, but on second thought it occurred to him that he might know something about the mysterious craft and its mysterious crew and concluded to address him.

"Good-evening, sir," he began.

"Good-evenin'," came the good natured response. "Been aboard the dead boat, I see."

The appellation "dead boat" rather startled the detective, but it led him to conclude the stranger must know all about the strange boat, and replied:

"Yes, I have been looking about it a little."

The stranger laughed.

"An' didn't make out much, I calkilate?"

"Well, no. As a matter of fact, I didn't learn anything that was calculated to clear the mystery which appears to surround the craft. But probably you can enlighten me?"

The man shook his head grimly.

"Ye've come to the wrong party fer thet, I kin tell ye," he said. "I've been round these slips fer a long time, an' seen thet queer hulk come an' go these many year, but I don't know no more 'bout her er her crew—ef she hez any—than you do."

This only had the effect of increasing the detective's wonder.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have seen this boat put in here and go out again without being able to learn anything about her?"

"Thet's whut I said."

"You must have encountered some of her crew at some time."

"Never onc't."

Burr hesitated.

"You mean that you were never able to get near enough to any of them to speak?" he ventured, at length.

"I don't mean nothin' o' the kind. Whut I mean is, thet I've never saw nobuddy aboard of her. Nuth'er hez anybuddy else round hiar thet I kin learn."

"You astonish me."

The stranger, who was evidently a sailor, indulged in a dry chuckle.

"A good many more hez been astonished afore you," he rejoined.

"Have none of you ever gone aboard of her to investigate?" inquired Burr.

"Not much," replied the other with a shudder. "You're the fu'st man I know of thet hed the nerve to board her. You couldn't git any one round hiar to do whut I seen you do fer all the gold ye could stow in her hold!"

"How did you come to speak of her as the dead boat, then?"

"Why, thet's whut we all call her, on account o' never seein' nobuddy 'bout her."

"Oh, I didn't know but the name had arisen from her peculiar cargo."

"Peculiar cargo?" ejaculated the other.

"Yes. I did not know but you might know what she carries, and that that was why you spoke of her as the dead boat."

"W'y, whut does she carry?" gasped the sailor.

"About all I saw were a lot of dead bodies."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the other in a tone of horror.

"If you doubt my word, you only have to come with me and see for yourself," smiled Burr.

"Come with you?" echoed the sailor breathlessly.

"Yes. From the opposite side of the craft you can look into the cabin. Will you go?"

"Not on yer life."

The detective laughed.

"Why, there is nothing to be afraid of," he insisted. "I have been around there twice and met with no calamity."

"Thet may be," muttered the stranger. "An' then ag'in ye might go an' meet yer death in no time."

"You won't go then?"

"Not much!"

"How are you to tell whether I am telling you the truth or not, if you don't investigate for yourself?"

"I'm willin' to take yer word fer it."

"Have you never heard sounds of voices emanating from the cabin of this strange craft?"

"Often. I heered 'em jest awhile ago."

"Well, what is your theory about the affair, anyway?"

"Eh?"

"What is your opinion as to this queer craft?"

"My opinion is thet she's manned by ghosts!" rejoined the sailor in a scared voice.

"An' now thet ye say there's dead bodies aboard of her, I'm sartin' of it!"

Burr could not refrain from laughing at the man's superstition and simplicity.

"My friend," said he, "believe me, there is nothing in your theory or that of anybody who holds such a one. But I'll tell you what I do believe."

"Whut?"

"This boat is owned by a gang of desperadoes, who use her as a place of refuge and probably as a fence for their stolen goods, and they have invented the mysticism which appears to hang about her for the purpose of keeping curious investigators away from her. Have you never reported the matter to the police?"

"Yas."

"What have they done about it?"

"Nothin'."

"Are they afraid to go aboard of her, too?"

"I dunno. I b'lieve they are. They pretend to sneer at the idea o' speerets, same's you do; but I never seen one on 'em board her yit. My 'pinion is thet they're 'bout as skittish ez the rest on us."

At that moment the lights in the cabin of of strange boat disappeared and at the same instant the sound of oars emanating from the opposite side of the craft could be heard.

Burr thought he might be mistaken at first, but when he listened more intently, he was satisfied that he had heard aright.

It appeared as though a small boat were coming alongside between the breakwater and the hull.

"There is somebody either coming or going," whispered the detective. "I'm going to see who it is."

With that he was about to jump down upon the guard again, when the stranger clutched his arm and held him back.

"Don't ye go!" he implored. "For God's sake, don't be fool enough to risk yer life ag'in!"

"There is no danger, my friend," laughed the detective, shaking himself loose and preparing to jump.

"Don't do it," repeated the other. "If ye do, ye'll never come back alive!"

"Have no fear on that score," laughed the detective as he sprung down upon the guard.

Another moment he was on the opposite side of the boat.

The dock-light revealed the dark form of a small boat down in the water alongside of the craft, and two men had just climbed aboard, while several more—he could not tell how many—were still in the small boat, and preparing to come aboard.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW OF A CLUE.

It was too dark for the detective to distinguish the men, now that the lights in the cabin had been put out, and fortunately they appeared not to have seen him.

And to prevent the possibility of them doing so, he stepped back and compressed himself as closely against the wall of the cabin as possible.

The rest of the men were not long in also climbing upon the guards and the whole

party then entered the cabin by way of a door which the detective had not before noticed.

But when they were all in, he was surprised that they did not make a light, and when he approached the window some moments later the cabin was as dark as a cellar. Burr was more puzzled than ever.

It was in vain that he listened at the open window for some sound of the men who had just entered the place.

Not a sound broke upon his ear.

He became satisfied then that there must be some compartment about the mysterious boat which he had not discovered.

He was seized with a desperate determination to probe the mystery to the bottom, regardless of consequences.

After satisfying himself that there really was no one in the cabin, he tried the door through which the party had passed, but only to find it locked.

That made little difference, however, as he could easily climb in at the window, which he did without delay.

When once inside he paused again to listen, but there was not the slightest sound.

Drawing his dark lantern from his pocket and lighting it, he shot the slide and threw the glow about the apartment.

There was not a soul in sight.

Moving the light about from one part of the cabin to another, he patrolled the entire length again, but still found nobody.

Returning to the center of the boat again, he examined the wall for the door through which the men had entered, but to his surprise, no door was there.

By pounding on the wall he found it to be hollow, however, which seemed to explain a portion of the mystery.

The wall was double, and the door only served to admit the parties to a passage-way between the walls.

That being the case, there must be a compartment below the cabin floor.

That was where the parties had evidently gone.

But how was the detective to reach it?

He already knew that the door was locked, and therefore there must be some other entrance to the compartment found.

With this in view he spent nearly an hour in searching walls and floor for a possible passage.

But all to no purpose.

There was not even the sign of any, and he was finally compelled to abandon it.

But he was far from abandoning the idea of reaching the lower compartment of the vessel.

There was the door, and although it was locked, he determined to find a way of opening it, even if he had to break the lock.

He returned to the outside of the boat and again tried the door.

There was no doubt but it was securely locked on the inside.

It was a hazardous thing to break into this place, considering the number and character of the men inside, but the detective did not stop to consider this now.

He was supplied with a vast assortment of adjustable keys, such as no other detectives in the world possessed, and which were of his own designing.

It was a remarkable lock indeed that would not yield to some of these wonderful keys, and it did not take long to find one which fitted the lock of this door, and in another moment he had it open.

It was so dark within that it was impossible to tell where the door led to.

The detective put his head inside and listened, but could hear no sound.

He next put out his hand and groped about in the darkness, and his hand came in contact with the opposite wall, showing that the passage was no more than a couple of feet wide.

Then feeling with his foot he discovered that the passage led downward.

Still hearing no sound of life, he was emboldened to flash the light of his dark lantern downward.

A narrow flight of steps descended, how far he could not tell, as the lower end was lost in the darkness.

Leaving gone this far, Burr was more determined than ever to get to the bottom of

the mystery, and at once began the descent of the steps.

He had first taken the precaution to shut off his light and draw his revolver, and he moved with the satiny tread of a cat.

When he had descended what appeared to him far enough to almost reach the bottom of the boat, he again paused and listened.

Still no sound.

He took a few more steps downward and suddenly came plump against some impediment which appeared to be a wall.

He groped about in the darkness with his hand, and to all appearances the wall continued all around, as though he had come into a narrow closet.

Shooting the slide of his lantern, he looked about.

He found himself hemmed in on all sides by a broad wall, and what was most curious, there appeared to be no outlet.

He knew that some portion of the wall must serve as a door, but there was neither knob or latch, so that if there was a door, it must be opened by some secret process.

But as nothing was visible in the shape of a spring, he could not divine what the process was.

Losing all patience with the puzzling contrivance, the detective at length threw his weight against what seemed to him the most probable place for a door to be, when to his surprise a portion of the wall not to exceed two feet wide flew open.

Still nothing but darkness.

Stepping through the opening, he again flashed his light about.

A large compartment opened about him, but to all appearance no one was there.

But when he listened, the sound of voices could be heard somewhere in the distance.

Guided by the sound, he moved cautiously along, throwing the light of his lantern in advance of him.

He had not proceeded far in this direction when he came to a standstill, for he had reached the side of the boat.

The sound of the voices was more distinct now, and appeared to be directly in front of him, or beyond the wall which he knew to be the gunwale of the vessel.

The only solution of this phenomenon he could think of was that the men were either on the outside of the boat or in the compartment of the vessel which lay alongside of this one.

Flashing his light along the wall, he vainly sought for a door or some other species of opening, and finally concluded to abandon the search and leave the place.

He turned upon his heel for this purpose, when he came face to face with a man.

As the light from his lantern fell upon the new-comer's face and form the detective at once recognized him as the young man whom he had seen in company with the old man from Greenwich Village.

The young man eyed the detective curiously, still wearing that good-natured smile.

Thus a full minute passed before either spoke, and then the young man's smile broadened considerably as he said:

"Looking for something, my friend?"

The detective was somewhat taken aback by the question, together with the man's coolness, but he soon recovered his self-possession and replied:

"Nothing in particular."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain what you are doing in here, then?" observed the young man, still smiling.

"With pleasure," rejoined Burr, imitating his questioner's nonchalance. "I am looking for a friend whom I expected to find in one of these boats, but I guess I have struck the wrong one, as he does not appear to be about."

This story was given at a venture, being the first thing that suggested itself to him, and it appeared to have no other effect than to amuse the young man, who smiled all the more, and asked:

"Who is your friend, a sailor?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"Edward Filkins."

"There is no such person about here," responded the young man, still good-naturedly.

"So I am inclined to believe. Good-evening."

With that Burr started to leave the compartment, and to his surprise the young man offered no objection to his going.

As he neared the narrow door through which he had come on entering the place the detective stole a glance back at the mysterious young man.

He was still standing in the same spot, and although with the light so far removed, he was but dimly visible, Burr could see that he was still watching him and still smiling.

The expression, the perpetual smile, had come to exert a strange, disagreeable effect upon the detective.

At first he had thought nothing of it, or if anything, it had impressed him rather agreeably, as a good natured face is apt to do, but it had gradually come to have a different effect.

As he saw it now it caused a feeling of dread to come over him.

And from that moment he was impressed with the idea that the young man was one of the greatest villains in the world.

Burr lost no time in the contemplation of the disagreeable countenance, however, but passed quickly through the narrow door and on up the narrow stairs.

He reached the guards without encountering any one, and a glance in at the open window showed him that the cabin was still in darkness.

He moved on around the guard to the opposite side of the boat, and paused for a moment to listen.

The sound of the revelers was clearly audible, and the strangest part of it was that instead of being in the next boat as it had seemed to him while in the hold of the mysterious craft, they appeared to be in the very compartment he had left.

His first impulse was to rush back and discover the whereabouts of the mystic crew, but upon maturer deliberation he realized the folly of the attempt and abandoned it.

He would report the matter to the superintendent of police and seek his advice and assistance in the matter.

With that end in view, he climbed upon the adjoining boat's deck, and was about to make his way across to the pier, when his progress was arrested by some one addressing him.

He looked up and beheld, in the dim light, the boatman who had warned him not to go aboard of the strange craft.

"Wal, w'ot did ye find over thar?" questioned the waterman.

"Not as much as I would have liked to have found," replied Burr. "Enough, though, to convince me that what I suggested about this being a rendezvous for thieves was correct."

"Ye didn't see no ghosts?"

"Not a ghost," laughed the detective.

"Wal, blame my cats, ef you hain't got more nerve than any critter I ever seen," growled the boatman. "I wouldn't 'a' venched over thar fer a cool million. An' ye didn't git killed er nothin'?"

"If I did, you're talking to a ghost now," smiled the detective, as he hurried away.

Reaching the shore, he picked his way across the muddy street and walked up Burling Slip.

The Slip was even more deserted now than when he passed along previously, but before he had reached Water street he became conscious that some one was following him.

It was too dark to see who the person was, but when the detective reached the corner of the street and crossed over and his pursuer passed under a light at this point, Burr looked back and saw that it was the young man whom he had encountered in the hold of the boat!

CHAPTER V.

THE CRIMSON CLUE.

ALTHOUGH there could be no doubt about the young man having seen the detective, he affected not to do so.

Indeed, when Burr glanced at him, out of the corner of his eye, in a manner not to attract his attention, the fellow was looking in another direction, and appeared to be totally ignorant of his existence.

Taking the cue from his unknown shadower, the detective decided to follow the same tactics, and affect not to see him.

Pausing but an instant upon the corner and appearing to be looking for the name of the street, Burr passed on up Water street.

He stepped as cautiously as possible in order that he might hear the other's footsteps should he continue to follow, he listened without turning his head, and soon became convinced that the fellow was still after him.

Thad went as far as Spruce street and turned up toward Park Row.

Still his pursuer followed him.

Burr had no fear of the fellow.

He was only curious about why he should be shadowing him.

At Park Row the detective made a sudden detour, crossed the street, and entered a cafe.

He entered one of a number of little stalls provided for customers who desired privacy, and sat down.

He ordered a mild drink and taking up a newspaper, pretended to be deeply engrossed in its contents.

A moment later his man entered and walked past him.

Apparently he did not see the detective.

The latter affected not to notice him.

The stranger entered the next stall and sat down at a table, picked up a newspaper and also appeared to be interested.

Burr was puzzled.

What could the fellow mean by this strange conduct?

In his eagerness and curiosity to discover what the stranger meant by following him, the detective had almost lost sight of the mystery he had set out to solve.

He could not see the stranger in the next stall although by craning his neck a trifle he could see his paper, and the stranger seemed to have lost all interest in the detective.

Burr laid down his paper and was contemplating slipping away, with a view to ascertaining whether the fellow would again follow him, but his attention was at that moment attracted by the appearance of a very ragged and disreputable-looking tramp.

The vagabond strolled in from the Nassau street side, and slouched indifferently along as if he hadn't a care in the world.

He was a queer contrast, with his rags and unshaved face and long unkempt hair, to the well-dressed crowd that thronged the place.

Burr watched him with a good deal of curiosity.

He expected to see him ejected at any moment.

The tramp slouched along past the detective's stall and past that of the stranger, and the latter did not move.

The tramp slouched to the other end of the cafe and glanced hungrily at the lunch-counter, and then slouched back.

Again he passed the stranger, but did not look in his direction, and the stranger did not look up from his paper.

Strolling on in an unconcerned manner toward the Nassau street door by which he had entered, Burr expected to see him go out, but in stead of doing so, he suddenly wheeled about, walked up to the bar and ordered something to drink.

His wants were attended to, although the bartender glowered suspiciously at the queer customer, but as the latter had taken the precaution to lay down the price of the beverage in advance, he had disarmed reproach, and the barkeeper had nothing to say.

The vagabond sipped his beer leisurely, stealing an occasional longing glance at the lunch-counter, but never venturing toward it.

This had continued for fully five minutes.

In the intensity of the interest he had suddenly taken in the tramp, the detective had forgotten the mysterious stranger, when suddenly that individual emerged from the stall and strolled leisurely up to the bar.

Burr wondered at this, as his wants had been supplied in the stall.

Nevertheless, the stranger not only walked up to the bar, but he ordered more refreshments.

The detective could not help noticing that he stood alongside of the tramp at the bar, although he had turned his back to him.

But somehow the detective could not help feeling that there was some connection between the two, and kept his eyes on them.

The tall young man still remained apparently unconscious of the tramp's presence,

and the tramp seemed equally oblivious of his very existence.

But Burr continued to watch them.

Presently he saw something that rewarded him for his vigilance.

The young man's hand stole out behind him, in the shadow of the counter, and the tramp's dirty fist, strange to say, went out to meet it.

Something white, which resembled an envelope, passed from the hand of the tall young gentleman to the hand of the tramp, and the latter stowed the article away about his ragged clothing somewhere.

Still, the casual observer, who only saw them from above the bar, would never have suspected that they had any more connection than any of the men at the opposite end of the room from each other.

When he had delivered the mysterious article the tall young man strolled back to his place in the stall, never once bestowing a look upon the detective, and the latter now became convinced that the fellow had not intentionally followed him, but by the merest coincidence happened to take the same course.

Almost immediately after that the tramp slouched out of the door by which he had come in, and being more interested in him now than the other man, Burr followed him.

The tramp turned the corner of the Times building and cut across City Hall Park.

He had given up his slouching gait now and walked at a brisk pace.

When he reached Broadway the detective was not far behind him, and saw the fellow presently board an uptown car.

As soon as Burr anticipated his intention he ran for the car and caught it.

His man had seated himself inside, so the detective remained on the platform, notwithstanding the rain drove in in cold intermittent dashes.

From his post the detective could see his man seated at the front of the car, and his dull, sodden face appeared to indicate that he was unconscious of anything beyond his own being.

On jogged the car, and drizzle, splash, swish came the rain.

Burr pulled the collar of his coat up about his ears and wondered how far the tramp was likely to ride.

As for the latter, he never moved in his position and never removed his eyes from the one point in space or the rain-dashed window on the opposite side of the car, for a single instant.

The conductor stamped his feet, whistled and peered alternately into the darkness and into the almost empty car.

Once he addressed the detective:

"W'at's de matter wid goin' inside, boss?"

"I prefer to stand here," was the dogged response, and the conductor tried another bar of "Daisy Belle."

Finally the car reached Forty-second street and the tramp got off.

Burr also alighted and, as soon as he saw which way his man had gone, proceeded to follow.

The tramp went in the direction of Fifth avenue.

Burr took no pains to conceal himself, as his man appeared utterly unconscious that he was being followed.

Arriving at Fifth avenue, the tramp turned up-town, walked the distance of a block and turned west again on Forth-third.

This was the first indication Burr had had that the fellow was desirous of disguising his purpose.

Even now his ruse had been too clumsy to deceive any one, but the fact of his walking west, then north and again west, appeared to indicate that he was desirous of throwing the shadower off the scent.

He evinced no open anxiety, however, and never once glanced back at his pursuer.

He continued in his new course for the distance of half a block, and stopped.

He stood for some seconds looking up at the house, which Burr remarked was in darkness.

Then he took the white package from his pocket and tried to decipher something, presumably an address, written on it, by the dim, uncertain flicker of an adjacent street-lamp.

Finally he appeared to be satisfied, for he ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

Presently the door was opened and some one appeared.

The detective had approached to within a few feet of the stoop, and was able to see all that passed.

There appeared to be a discussion between the tramp and the attendant at the door.

"My orders was to give it to him, an' no-buddy else," the tramp was heard to mutter.

"What's the difference?" demanded the other. "Whatever comes here is given to me for him."

Burr now discovered that the attendant was a woman.

"Wal, I don't know nothin' about thet," growled the tramp. "I've got my orders, an' thet's all I know 'bout it."

"Are you sure it is from him?" questioned the woman.

"Do I know?" muttered the fellow. "Do I know it's rainin'? W'y, he gived it to me with his own hands."

"Where?"

"In de Times Cafe, see?"

There was a familiarity about that voice that struck the detective forcibly.

Where had he heard it?

Then it occurred to him.

If that was not the voice of the young man whom he had spoken to in front of the old house in Greenwich Village, he had never been more mistaken in his life.

But what could he be doing in this guise?

He listened.

"And he told you to give it to no one but Carter?" pursued the woman.

"Yes'm."

Here was another matter of wonder.

Either the fellow was lying, or he and the tall young man must have had some means of secret communication which was incomprehensible to the detective.

"Well, he isn't here, and if you do not wish to leave it, you may just take it back," snapped the woman, preparing to close the door.

This appeared to have the effect of bringing the tramp to reason.

He hesitated, and then said:

"It's a long ways, mum, an' I hed to pay me own car-fare."

"I can't help that," she rejoined, still more peremptorily than before. "I shall give you nothing unless you give me the letter."

Again the tramp pondered.

It was evident that his orders had been imperative.

He scratched his head and twisted his legs, and appeared unable to make up his mind what to do.

"Hurry up," cried the woman impatiently. "Either give it to me, or go along about your business."

"Ye think it'll be all right, d'ye, mum?" faltered the fellow.

"Certainly."

"Wal, my orders was to give it to nobuddy but him, but as he ain't here, 'tain't no fault o' mine, an' I reckon it'll be all right."

With that he handed her the letter.

"I hope it'll be all right," he added as if still apprehensive that he was not doing right.

The woman made no reply to this last remark.

She seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the package, and there was an expression of horror on her face as she ejaculated:

"Why, there's blood on this envelope! Where did it come from?"

"Don't ax me, mum," chuckled the tramp. "Ax them as knows. 'Tain't fer me to know, ner to tell if I did."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

THE woman looked at the tramp and shuddered.

His levity seemed to strike her with horror.

And this only increased his merriment.

She did not speak, and, handing him a piece of money, closed the door.

The tramp laughed again, and walked down the steps to the street.

Burr stepped out and confronted him.

The fellow stopped and recoiled like a man who has been discovered in the act of committing a crime.

The detective eyed him keenly, and the tramp glared savagely at him.

"Wal?" grunted the vagabond at last.

"Well?" returned the detective, smiling at the other's consternation.

"W'at d'ye want?" muttered the fellow.

"I haven't said I wanted anything, have I?"

"W'at 're ye standin' there for, then?"

"This is a free country, I believe."

"Huh!"

The fellow grunted contemptuously.

"I do want something, however," pursued the detective in a persuasive tone.

"W'at is it?" growled the tramp.

"What was that you delivered at that house?"

A low chuckle came from the tramp.

"Wal, I like your gall!" he muttered.

"I am glad you do, and in that case I hope you will answer my question."

"Not on yer life!"

"Why not?"

"'Cause, it's none o' yer business."

"But suppose I prove to you that it is my business?"

"Den I might tell yer, but as I know it ain't, I'll never cackle. See?"

"Suppose I tell you that I am a detective, and have the power to arrest you unless you tell me?"

"Youse a beak?"

"Yes."

"An' yer want me to tell yer w'at I delivered at de house, eh?"

"Unless you want me to run you in."

"In dat case I'll tell yer."

"What was it?"

"A letter."

"What kind of a letter?"

"W'y, jes' a common letter what was wrote. See?"

"Where did you get it?"

"Say, youse is somethin' on de screw, ain't yer? W'y, de gent w'ot wrote it, o' course."

"What is his name?"

"Say, if his Satanic Majesty don't know 'im no better dan w'at I do, mister, he'll have ter git a letter o' interdiction afore he goes down below er go in on de strangers' list."

"Do you pretend to tell me that you don't know the name of the man who handed you that letter in the Times Cafe awhile ago?" questioned the detective.

"Naw."

"But I heard you tell the lady who came to the door awhile ago that you had received instructions not to give the letter to any one but a certain person. Did you receive such instructions?"

"Shure."

"From whom?"

"De duck w'at gived me de letter."

"When did he give you these instructions?"

"W'en he gived me de letter, o' course."

"I happen to know that he did nothing of the kind."

"Eh?"

"When he walked up to the bar and handed you the letter from behind, he never spoke to you at all, or even glanced at you."

"Dat don't make no difference, mister. Some folks has ways o' talkin' widout usin' deir mout's, an' dat covey's one on 'em."

"You must understand this silent language also, then."

"Shure."

"Where did you learn it?"

"From me fodder."

"Was he a crook?"

"Dat's right."

"Where is your father now?"

"Doin' time, o' course. W'at d'ye t'ink?"

"You must have met this man who gave you the letter before to-night, haven't you?"

"Onc't."

"Where?"

"In de same place."

"Don't you know where he belongs?"

"Nope."

"Come now," uttered the detective impatiently, "doesn't he belong in the house where I saw you this afternoon, in Greenwich Village?"

This question staggered him.

He was evidently not looking for anything

of the kind, and was at a loss how to answer for a moment.

But he was too shrewd to be put out long.

"Say, was dat youse w'at was a-chinnin' me down dere dis afternoon, mister?" he asked.

"Perhaps. But answer my question, will you?"

"Wal, I t'ought I seen yer some place afore, but couldn't make out."

"Will you answer my question?" persisted the detective.

"W'at's dat?"

"Does not this fellow who gave you the letter to fetch up here belong in the old house in Greenwich Village?"

"Naw."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause, nobody don't live dere but de old man an' de hunchback."

"You are sure of that?"

"Dead sure."

"How came you to go down to the saloon where you met this man to-night?"

"He axed me to go dere."

"You saw him before to-night, then?"

"Yep."

"Was it before or after he committed the murder?"

The fellow started.

He stared at the detective with a frightened countenance.

"I dunno w'at ye mean," he finally stammered.

"Oh, yes you do."

"S'elp me Moses, I don't, sir."

There was a sincerity about the fellow's denial that Burr could not overlook.

It was impossible not to believe in his innocence of this matter, at least.

"Were you not aware that this man killed another man to-night before you met him in the saloon?" questioned the detective.

"No, sir," he affirmed stoutly. "I may be tough an' all dat, but I ain't never been mixed up in nothin' o' dat kind, mister."

"What did you mean by your levity when the woman asked you how the blood came on the envelope you gave her?"

"W'at?"

"You appeared to see something very funny about the fact that there was blood on the envelope. What did you mean by that?"

"It wasn't 'cause dere was blood on it dat I laughed, but 'cause de dame made sech a face over it, as if she'd never seen claret in her sweet life. Dat's right, mister."

"Have you no idea how the blood came there?"

"Not I. I never noticed it till she spoke of it. You see, I got de envelope in de dark an' never looked at it till I went to look at de 'dress, an' den I didn't notice nothing out o' de way."

"Didn't you notice a spot on it?"

"Yep, I seen a spot, but I t'ought it was a spot of ink."

"Well, I'll let you off on one condition," said Burr.

"W'at's dat?" demanded the fellow eagerly.

"That you will say nothing to these fellows about meeting me."

"Yer kin trust me on dat, mister," promised the tramp. "It wouldn't do me no good to squeal. I git me little divvy fer carryin' de letters, an' it ain't none o' my business if de gang gits run in fer deir crooked business."

"I'll trust you; but mind, if you deceive me it won't be well for you. I'll spot you sooner or later."

"I know dat, sir, an' fer dat reason mum's de word."

"What is your name?"

"Terrence Mallon, dough de boys calls me Teddy or Mickey."

"Very well, Teddy, you may go about your business, but as I said, it won't be well for you to betray me."

"Dat's right."

And away he went.

Notwithstanding the fellow's appearance of sincerity and his solemn promise of fidelity, Burr could not resist the temptation of again shadowing him.

Mickey walked at a brisk pace as far as Eighth avenue this time, and then took a down-town car.

Fearing that the fellow might be on his

guard this time, the detective took the precaution to step into a doorway before reaching the avenue and slipped on a false beard.

He boldly boarded the same car then, and, though he sat within a few seats of Mickey, the latter did not appear to recognize him.

As Burr expected he would, Mickey got off at Greenwich Village, and he followed suit.

A few minutes' walk brought them to the Eighth street rookery, and the tramp turned in here.

The house was in darkness as usual, or at least the blinds were closed so that no light was emitted.

Mickey did not enter by the front door, but went to the back of the house.

After seeing him enter, the detective began to devise means by which he could get in without the knowledge of the inmates.

He hoped that the tramp might leave the back door unfastened, but there was no such good luck.

The door was locked.

There must be some other means devised. He listened at the back door, but no sound came to him.

There was an old tree at the rear of the house.

One of its branches extended to an upper window.

Would it pay to climb the tree?

It would probably assist him to enter the house, but at this hour would there be any use of doing so?

It was now long after midnight.

He decided it would.

Burr knew that these fellows kept late hours, and the fact of Mickey going in at this hour portended something, he thought.

The detective was a good climber, and he undertook the task.

The trunk of the tree was slippery from the rain, but by dint of hard work he finally succeeded in reaching the large limb which extended toward the house.

It would be no easy matter to crawl out on this, but there was no task from which he would shrink, if there was anything to be gained thereby.

Several minutes were consumed in getting out to the end of the branch, and Burr found himself within a foot of one of the shutters.

It was a hazardous thing to reach it without falling, but he risked it, only to find the shutter fastened.

What was to be done?

He was determined upon success now, and, grasping one of the slats, gave it a vigorous jerk.

The fastening must have been extremely frail, for it broke and the shutter came open.

Fortunately the window was up, and making a vigorous spring he succeeded in grasping the ledge, and climbed in.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

Burr did not fully realize his situation until he was inside the house.

He realized it then, because he saw that if he had been suddenly attacked there would have been no means of escape.

It was one thing to climb from the tree to the window and quite another to get back.

However, he was in for it now, and fear was a component entirely lacking in his composition.

The room into which he had come was very dark, save for the faint light from the open shutter.

Everything was extremely quiet.

Not a sound could be heard, and he came to the conclusion that his first surmise, that the inmates were all abed, was correct.

He listened intently for some minutes.

The beating of the rain against the windows and the wail of the wind through the crazy old house, were all that he could hear.

He moved on a short distance, and by feeling about discovered that he was approaching an open door.

Without the slightest idea where he was going, he passed through the door, moving as noiselessly as a shadow.

He again paused to listen.

The sounds of voices away off somewhere in the darkness came to him.

He could not locate the sound, but guessed that it must be in a distant part of the house.

Guided by the direction of the sound, he moved cautiously on.

Suddenly his hand came in contact with a railing.

It was not difficult to discover that the railing belonged to a stairway.

Burr knew that he was on the second floor.

He discovered now that the voices came from above.

Groping about in the dense darkness, the detective finally found the foot of the stairs leading to the next floor above and proceeded to softly ascend.

When he reached the top of the stairs, to his surprise, he could hear nothing.

He listened, but the talking he had heard a moment before had ceased.

Burr knew not what to make of it.

Had he made a mistake in coming upstairs, or had the talkers heard him ascending and ceased talking on that account?

Taking a few steps along the unlighted hall, he paused again and listened.

Everything was very quiet, but presently the talking was resumed, and it was so close to him as to cause him to start.

It seemed as if he must be in the same room with the speakers, for every word was distinct, without that muffled vagueness peculiar to voices coming through a wall.

It was too dark to make out where he was, and after the resumption of the conversation he was afraid to move lest he should be heard, and so he remained perfectly still and listened.

Almost the first thing he heard was the voice, as the detective imagined, of the young man he had met in the boat.

"Did you deliver the letter to him?" it asked.

"Yep," came the well-known voice of Mickey. "That is—he wasn't dere, see? an' I gived it to de lady."

"The dence you did!" growled the first speaker. "Was that what I instructed you to do?"

"Nope," faltered the tramp, "but he wasn't dere, an' de lady said she'd give it to him as soon's he comed."

"That had nothing to do with it," snorted the young man angrily. "She may and may not give it to him. I told you to deliver it to no one but him."

Before the tramp had time to offer any further excuse a third party interposed:

"I have no doubt she'll give it to him, Harry. I wouldn't worry about it."

"She may and may not, as I said," growled the other. "But that is not the point; when I give orders for a certain thing, I want that done and nothing else. You know the trouble we've had through that woman's scheming, Martin."

"Yes, I know she has put us out a good many times," admitted the other, "but the business is too far along this time for her to be able to interfere with any effect."

"I don't know about that. Of course the main part of the work is done, but the profitable part is to come yet, and if she has a mind to, she can give us as much trouble as she did before."

"Yes, it was all wrong," put in a party who up to that time had remained silent. "Whether she gives us away or not, she will be sure to make trouble with us, and ten chances to one she won't let Carter come."

"I believe that is the trouble already," observed Harry. "He ought to be here by this time if he was coming."

"I thought I heard him on the stairs awhile ago," interjected still another voice.

"I thought so too," said Harry, "but I guess it was only the wind we heard."

A short silence followed this digression, and then one of the men asked:

"Suppose he doesn't come, Harry?"

"He will remain away, I suppose," replied Harry, coolly.

"But the plot?"

"We can carry that out now without him," interrupted Harry.

"Why wait, then?"

"I shall not," retorted the young man, and from the sound of his voice Burr could tell that he had risen to his feet. "I have waited long enough for him. It is now after two o'clock. Come!"

The next instant a door opened a short distance from the detective, and, turning about, he observed a stream of light pouring into the hall directly behind him.

He then discovered that the he had unconsciously walked through an open door into a room which was only separated from the one in which the conspirators were by a curtain.

That explained why he could hear them so readily.

The curtain was dense enough to shut out the light, but not the sound of their voices.

The door was opened from the same room into the hall he had left a few moments before, and it was apparent the men were preparing to leave the place on some expedition.

But the first one had only stepped out when a sound below caused him to stop, turn to his companions and say:

"Listen! I believe that is Carter now."

The speaker was Harry, and the sound which had arrested his attention had been a rap on the door below.

A second later the rap was repeated, and Harry said:

"Run down, Mickey, and let him in."

The next instant Burr saw the form of the tramp glide past the door and disappear.

Presently the sound of two persons climbing the stairs at a hurried gait.

The detective saw them pass the door of the room in which he was, and an instant later heard them in the next room.

"How are you, Carter!" cried Harry.

This was followed by a general greeting all around, and then Harry resumed:

"What kept you so late, Carter?"

"Late?" exclaimed the other. "Why, I just received the letter a moment ago. I came as soon as I received the letter."

"You just got back then, eh?"

"Got back? No. I haven't been away."

"The dence you haven't!" ejaculated Harry. "Why your wife told Mickey that you were not at home."

"That was all right. I told her to tell anybody who came to the door that I was out," laughed Carter.

"But how was it you did not get the letter sooner?"

"She gave it to me as soon as she received it," asserted Carter.

"Impossible! Mickey gave her the letter over an hour and a half ago."

"Half-past twelve" explained the tramp.

"That is strange. She just brought it to me a moment before I left. As I say, I came as soon as I received it."

"Well, we have no time to lose now," added Harry impatiently. "We shall be late as it is."

"There's plenty of time," rejoined Carter indifferently. "However, we may as well go."

Nothing more was said, and the party proceeded to file out of the room and down the stairs, the last one bringing a lamp in his hand.

By its light the detective could see that there were six of them altogether, including Mickey.

When the last one had descended the stairs Burr stepped out to the top of the stairway and looked down.

He could recognize none of them except the hunchback and the old man whom he had seen enter the house earlier in the evening, and, of course, Mickey.

At the bottom of the last flight of stairs the light was extinguished and then Burr heard the door open and the party pass out.

Burr, finding himself left alone in the darkness, hesitated a moment and then crept down the stairs.

He did not waste any time in getting to the front door and opening it, but when he did he found that the men were out of sight.

The detective hurried out to the street, and saw a group of men in the distance, moving away at a rapid gait and, guessing that it was his crowd, hastened in pursuit.

They continued as far as Seventh avenue on foot, where there was a hack standing.

It appeared that the vehicle must have been engaged in advance, for, without any parley, the men entered it.

The detective now noticed that there were but five of them.

Mickey had evidently been left behind.

As soon as the last man was inside the hack the driver whipped up and drove away at a break-neck speed.

Burr was in despair.

There was no other vehicle in sight.

This discovery was made before the hack had gone more than a quarter of a block, and then his mind was made up what to do.

He was a swift runner, and a dash of a few seconds brought him up with the retreating vehicle.

It was too dark at this point for the driver to observe him, and the detective jumped on behind.

"Now," he mused, "drive as fast and wherever you like. I am with you."

The hack proceeded in this direction till it reached Fifth avenue, and then turned uptown.

Again it dashed on and on, and the detective wondered where the men were going.

The rain continued to pour, and in his exposed position, he was becoming drenched to the skin.

There was a hum of conversation inside the hack, but the detective could hear nothing of it on account of the rumble of the vehicle over the rough pavement but from the tone he imagined there was a disagreement of some kind, for they appeared to be quarreling.

On, on, the hack pushed, and the detective began to think the men intended going out of the city in a direct line, but at Ninetieth street the hack turned toward the East River.

A little while later Burr found himself at the Astoria ferry, and he quickly alighted from his perch in time to escape observation by the driver.

As the vehicle rolled off the boat on the Astoria side, however, he resumed his seat.

The hack here turned east and drove some distance out into the country, and finally stopped in front of a country residence surrounded by a high wall.

The five men alighted and entered the gate, which Burr noticed they opened with a key, and closed behind them.

So far he had escaped observation, but the question was how to get in, as the wall was over eight feet high and the gate locked securely.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HORRIBLE REVELATION.

BURR knew that it would not do to attempt to open the gate, even if there had been any chance of success, as the driver would see him and doubtless give the alarm to those inside.

So he must effect an entrance in some other way.

Dropping from his perch on the back of the hack, he returned to the road and walked along to the end of the wall.

Where the wall, which was of brick, turned to form the angle of the lot, it was joined by a low fence or wall of loose stones.

Mounting this, he found that he was sufficiently elevated so that by springing up he could grasp the top of the higher wall, but, dark as it was (it was now the darkest hour just preceding daylight,) he could discern that there was a row of ugly spikes surmounting the top of the wall.

This rendered his task still more difficult.

But it did not deter him from his purpose, and he made the spring.

Luckily he caught the top of the wall without injury from the murderous spikes, and proceeded to draw himself up.

Once on top of the wall, he realized that the worst was yet to come.

It was as dark as a dungeon inside the wall, and it was impossible to tell what was below him.

However, it would not do to hesitate now, so letting himself down to the tips of his fingers, he let go and dropped.

Fortunately the ground where he lighted was soft and the fall caused him no inconvenience.

Hastening toward the house, he observed that, like the old house in Greenwich Village, it was in darkness, except for a light which shone out of an upper window.

The window was in the second story (the house was but two stories high), and without attempting an entrance by way of the door, he looked about for some means of climbing up to the window.

There was a tree near by, but not close enough to the house for his purpose.

As the house was surrounded by an orchard, he guessed that there would be a ladder somewhere about.

In this he was not mistaken, for he had not searched far before he came upon a ladder standing against one of the fruit-trees.

This he carried and placed against the side of the house and then climbed up.

But when he reached the top of the ladder he was disappointed to find that it did not reach the window by a yard or more, and consequently he could not see in at the window by standing on the top rung, as he had hoped to be able to do.

Descending once more, he looked about for something to raise the ladder to the necessary height.

At length his efforts were rewarded by the discovery of an old table, which he placed under the foot of the ladder.

He again climbed up, although the wet, slippery table rendered his position precarious in the extreme.

Nevertheless, by exercising extreme caution, he finally succeeded in reaching the top without falling, and grasped the ledge of the window.

Fortunately there were neither blinds nor curtains to the window, and he had a perfect view of the interior of the room from which it looked out.

A strange sight met his gaze.

The five men and a woman were collected about a chair in which a third person appeared to be reclining.

He could neither tell the sex of the person in the chair nor what the group of rascals were doing.

Yet he guessed there was something wrong from the countenances of the group.

Finally he saw one of the party (it was the old man) pour something out into a spoon and give it to the person in the chair.

This circumstance would not have occasioned any surprise had the person been of a different character, but as it was the detective felt sure that some horrible crime was being committed.

And what rendered it more appalling he was powerless to prevent it or offer any assistance to the victim.

The operation, whatever it was, was soon over, and the group drew back from the reclining-chair.

Burr then saw that the chair contained a young and apparently beautiful lady.

She was very pale and seemed to be unconscious.

The old man, still holding the bottle from which he had poured the mysterious draught and the spoon from which he had administered it, said loud enough for the detective to hear:

"That ought to do the work."

"Do you think there will be no failure this time, doctor?" inquired the man called Harry.

"No failure this time, my boy," replied the old man with a villainous smile.

"I am glad of that," said the other, whom Burr noticed was exceedingly pale and nervous. "I don't want any more of the bungling we had before."

"You need have no fear of that, my boy," still smiled the old wretch. "And there would have been none before if my instructions had been carried out."

"Well, gentlemen, let us not stand here," put in the woman, who had been a silent but apparently pleased spectator up to this time. "We can do no more good or harm either by standing here. Let us go below and have some refreshments. You gentlemen must be cold and wet after your long ride."

If they were cold and wet, thought the detective, what would she think of him?

Presently they all moved away and the victim in the chair was left alone.

Now was Burr's chance to act, if he ever

hoped to save the victim (as he supposed her to be,) but how was he to get in?

It would have been an easy matter to have drawn himself up and entered the window, had it been up, but as it was this was impossible.

But he must try.

He could not stand idle and allow a human being to die before his very eyes without making an effort to assist him or her.

Springing up, he gave a vigorous push on the sash.

To his delight it moved slightly.

He was encouraged to make another attempt, and sprung at it again.

This time the window shot up several inches, and being suspended on weights, it remained there.

This allowed space for him to crawl through, and, making a vigorous spring, he landed with his stomach on the window-sill.

Another instant and he was inside the room.

He moved breathlessly to the side of the reclining-chair and peered into the face of the victim.

She was to all appearances dead.

Placing his hand on her wrist, he found it cold and almost pulseless.

If there was any life, it was very flickering and weak.

Burr drew a small mirror from his pocket and placed it near her lips.

Removing it for examination, he was gratified to see that there was a faint blurr, showing that the woman still breathed.

Taking a flask from his pocket, he poured a few drops of brandy between the lips and watched the effect.

He also bathed her face with the liquid, and was soon gratified to remark unmistakable indications of approaching consciousness.

Meanwhile he chafed her hands vigorously.

Presently she opened her eyes and gazed languidly about.

Finally her eyes fell upon the detective's face.

She stared at him curiously for some seconds, and then said in a feeble voice:

"Who are you?"

"A friend, who wishes to rescue you," replied Burr in a kindly tone.

She stared at him more curiously than ever.

"A friend?" she whispered, dreamily.

"Yes, and I desire to rescue you from these fiends who wish to murder you!"

"How strangely you talk," she said languidly. "Where are my other friends?"

"Where are my sister and brother?"

"I do not know where they are, but they have gone and left you. You must go with me. Do you think you can walk?"

"Why should I go with you, and leave my friends?" she demanded, shrinking from him instinctively.

"Why should I leave my friends to go with you, whom I have never seen before?"

"Because your friends, as I told you before, have all left you, and the people who now have you in charge desire to kill you. Come! It may even now be too late, but we will try to reach some physician before the deadly drug they have given you takes effect!"

"Deadly drug?" she said wonderingly.

"They have given me no deadly drug."

"But I know they have, and if you do not come with me at once, it may be too late."

"I have no fear. My friends would allow no wrong to come to me, I am satisfied."

"But I tell you your friends have left you," persisted the detective, almost losing his patience.

"How came you here?" she questioned suspiciously.

"I followed your enemies here, and, knowing that they intended to do you some great injury, entered this house at the risk of my own life to rescue you."

She looked long and earnestly into his frank, honest eyes, and finally responded:

"You appear honest. I wish I knew whether what you tell me is true or not. But it is too awful, too terrible, to believe."

"You must, you shall believe me, and you must go with me! Your life depends upon it!"

With that he attempted to lift her in his arms, believing her to be too weak to walk, but she shrunk away from him and attempted to scream.

But at that instant a kind of spasm seized her. She writhed in a terrible convulsion for a few seconds, and then sunk back, apparently lifeless.

His first thought was the restorative, but upon second consideration, he concluded not to revive her until she was safely beyond the reach of her enemies.

Wrapping her form in a blanket he found at hand, the detective raised her in his powerful arms and stole softly toward the door.

His burden was not heavy, and he had no difficulty in resting her on his knee while he opened the door.

A moment later he was in the hall.

He paused for an instant, before beginning the descent of the stairs, to listen.

The sound of merriment reached him from somewhere below, and he believed there was a possibility of escape without detection or impediment.

Softly he glided down the stairs.

There was no one in sight in the lower hall, and he lost no time in reaching and opening the front door.

When once more in the open air, he was gratified to discover that the rain had ceased and there was an appearance of clearing.

Daylight was just breaking, and he realized that every moment was precious.

Hurrying with all the speed he could command to the front gate, he attempted to open it.

It was locked, but upon examination, he found that the key had been left in the lock.

Quickly turning the key, he opened the gate and approached the hack.

The driver sat on the box, sleeping profoundly.

Burr placed his burden inside the carriage, and then getting in himself, called out in a loud voice:

"To the city!"

The next instant the innocent hackman wheeled his vehicle around and drove away.

CHAPTER IX.

A MELANCHOLY STORY.

As soon as the hack was under way and Burr felt assured that he would not be disturbed, he set to work endeavoring to restore the young woman to consciousness.

Making free use of the brandy, he first poured some down her throat and bathed her face with it.

He then chafed her hands and wrists vigorously.

In a few minutes his efforts were rewarded by the patient opening her eyes and showing other signs of returning consciousness.

The woman stared up into his face with the same wondering expression he had noted before, but did not speak for a long time.

Finally she said:

"Oh, yes, I know now. You are the same one who came to me a long time ago and said you were my friend and wanted to save me from some persons whom you thought were my enemies."

"Yes, I am the same person," replied Burr.

"How do you feel now?"

"Very well," she answered in a drowsy voice, "only so sleepy, so tired."

"Do you feel no sickness, no nausea?"

"No."

"I am glad of that. I feared they might have given you some sort of poison."

"Poison?" she exclaimed with faint animation. "Why should they give me poison?"

"I do not know why they should, but they have evidently given you something which has produced this stupor from which I have just restored you. That is why I desired to get you to a physician as soon as possible."

This remark called her attention for the first time that she was traveling, and she looked up quickly, glanced out of the window, and then back at the detective's face.

"Where am I?" she gasped in a frightened voice.

"You are all right," he responded reassuringly. "I am your friend, and will see no harm come to you."

"But where am I?" she insisted. "I seem to be going."

"So you are. I am taking you to a doctor."

"Why did you not bring the doctor to me?"

"It was impossible. You were in the hands of some very bad people, who would have murdered you. They would not have allowed the doctor to attend you."

She was silent a long time, and gazed wonderingly out of the window.

Finally she said in the same dreary tone:

"It is so strange. I thought I was with my friends all the time. 'But—but—' she suddenly faltered, 'we are out in the country! Why are you taking me out into the country? Are there not plenty of doctors in the city? Why don't you go to Doctor Ainsworth? He has been treating me.'"

"I did not bring you to the country," replied the detective, who now saw that she had been carried away to the country while in a state of unconsciousness. "You were in the country, and I am taking you back to the city."

"I was in the country?"

"Yes. Did you not know it?"

"No. I thought I was in the city. I certainly was when I went to sleep."

"Whereabouts in the city?"

"At my sister's house, in Forty-third street."

This was the house where the letter had been delivered by Mickey Mallon, the tramp.

Burr began to see daylight, he thought.

"Your sister lives at No. 58 Forty-third street, does she not?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir," she replied with a surprised look. "How did you know?"

"I have good reason to know the number of that house," he rejoined carelessly. "But who is Dr. Ainsworth?"

"He is the doctor who has been attending me."

"Where does he live?"

"I do not know. My sister could tell you."

"What sort of a looking man is he?"

"He is an old gentleman, very gray and very much stooped."

"Long beard and small, black, snaky eyes?"

"Yes, yes. You describe him exactly. You have seen him?"

"Yes."

"I don't like his looks, do you?"

"I should rather think not. He is a scoundrel. It was he who administered the dose which caused your late drowsiness."

"Was he in the country with me?"

"Yes. It was through following him and his crowd that I found you."

"Who was with him?"

"There were four others, but I do not know any of them. One of them is a tall, handsome young man whom they called Harry, and another is—"

"A tall young man?" she interrupted.

"And they call him Harry?"

"Yes."

"Why, that must be my brother!" she exclaimed with a horrified look. "Harry would wish to do me no harm, I know."

"So you imagine, miss. But you are mistaken. I happen to know that he desires to kill you!"

"Impossible. Why should he wish to do this?"

"I do not know, but I shall find out. It is my business to find out."

She stared at him with more astonishment than ever.

"Why do you take such an interest in me?" she finally asked. "You do not know me."

"No, but as a detective, an officer of the law, it is my duty to learn all wicked secrets possible and rescue those who are likely to suffer at the hands of the vicious."

"You are a detective, then?"

"Yes, miss. And now that I have been frank enough to tell you who I am, I trust you will be equally frank with me and tell me who you are."

She hesitated, meantime studying his face diligently.

At length she answered:

"I believe I can trust you, sir. You look so honest and frank that it does not seem possible that you could deceive me."

"I hope you can. I could have no mo-

tive, except a good one, for doing what I have."

"I believe you, and will tell you my name. My name is Florence Disdale."

"And your brother's name is Harry or Henry Disdale, eh?"

"Henry Disdale, yes, sir."

"And your sister's husband's name is Carter, is it not?"

"Yes, sir. Do you know him?"

"No, but I heard the others call him by name. Has there been any serious difference between you and your sister or brother-in-law, or your brother?"

"Never."

"Have they always been kind to you?"

"Always. Nobody could be more kind and gentle than they have always been to me."

"Have you any fortune your own?"

"Yes, sir, considerable."

"Are your brother and brother-in-law rich?"

"No, sir, they are very poor."

"How came you to be rich and they poor?"

She was silent for some moments, and looked off out of the hack window as if trying to collect her thoughts.

Meanwhile they had crossed the ferry and were traveling down Fifth avenue.

At length her eyes wandered back to his face (she was still reclining on the seat where he had first placed her) and she resumed:

"I was a little girl when my father and mother died and was adopted by a rich lady by the name of Crandell. She had no children of her own and I think she must have had as much regard for me as if I had been her own child, for when she died she left me all of her property."

"How much did it amount to?"

"Over two millions of dollars."

"Where did she live?"

"In San Francisco."

"When did you come to New York?"

"About six months ago, after mamma, as I called her, died."

"And came to live with your sister?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you in good health then?"

"Perfect. I had never been sick in my life, but had not been here long before I began to lose my health—I think it must be the climate which does not agree with me. For I have not been well since then."

"This Doctor Ainsworth has been attending you all the time, has he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has your brother or sister ever said anything to you about willing your property to them?"

"Harry once asked me, when I was very low, whom I was going to leave my fortune to, in case anything should happen, and I told him that there was no one but him and sister, and that they should have it. He seemed to be unwilling to accept it, as he said he was able to earn a living, and did not want to feel that he was dependent upon any one for the money he might have. This made me the more anxious to leave it to him, and finally at my request he consented to call in a lawyer, and then I made my will."

"Leaving everything to them, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"This accounts for your illness," observed Burr, calmly.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the woman, sharply.

"I mean that your brother and sister are deliberately trying to put you out of the way for the purpose of securing your money."

"You are mistaken, sir!" she cried with all the vehemence her emaciated condition would permit. "My brother and sister would never be guilty of such a thing."

"I wish you were right, but I have the best of reasons for knowing that you are not, and I shall prove it to you before very long."

She was about to reply, when Burr noticing that the hackman was about turning into Forty-third street, put his head out of the window and gave him the order to drive to a number in Thirty-fourth street.

For the first time the hackman noticed that he had not been driving the same man he had brought out and stared accordingly.

"Yez air not the mon Oi dhruv out, sor," he growled.

"That's all right," replied the detective.

"Mr. Drisdale, the gentleman who engaged the hack from you, employed me to bring the lady back to the city."

This was a hazardous venture, but a successful one, for the hackman straightened up on his box, whipped up his horses, and drove on down the avenue.

When they reached his own home in Thirty-fourth street Burr carried the young lady into the house and, after seeing that she was properly attended to, hurried away to fetch a friend, who was one of the most expert physicians in the city.

The doctor whose name was Rollston, made an examination of the patient at once, and then prescribed for her.

"What is the trouble?" questioned the detective.

"She is suffering from the effects of some sort of slow poison," was the reply.

"Is there any hope of her recovery?"

"Yes, I think we shall bring her through, although she is in a pretty bad condition. It is fortunate you rescued her when you did, for the last dose, which is just beginning to take effect, would undoubtedly have finished her."

"Do you think the fatigue of the ride did her any harm?"

"On the contrary, it probably saved her life, for it prevented the action of the drug, which would have done its work had she remained quiet."

CHAPTER X.

TAKEN IN.

ABOUT the same time the scene just described was passing, late in the afternoon, a man alighted from an incoming train at the Pennsylvania depot at Jersey City.

From his dress and manner it was evident that he was from the West, and the great glass roofed building, the throng of people and the bustle and confusion of the place appeared to bewilder him, for he stood for some moments, carpet bag in hand, looking about him and evidently undecided, if indeed, he knew, which way to go.

But he had not stood thus long before some one came to his assistance.

A well-dressed young man who by the merest accident chanced to be passing, and, seeing the stranger and guessing his trouble, stepped up and addressed him.

"Pardon me, sir," he began in a polite tone, "but you appear to be a stranger here. Where do you wish to go?"

The Westerner eyed the young man suspiciously without answering.

He had heard a good deal about bunco men, and guessed at once that this was a specimen, and he considered himself altogether too cunning to be taken in by one of them.

Noticing his hesitation, the young man continued:

"It's none of my business, sir, where you want to go, and it makes not the slightest difference to me whether you wish to take my advice or treat me civilly or not, but I cannot afford to forget my own politeness on that account. If you wish to go to New York, follow that crowd on to the boat there."

And the young man pointed to the crowd which was surging toward the ferry-boat.

"You needn't thank me," he went on with a tone of bitterness in his voice. "I am sufficiently paid to know that I have put you right—that is if you want to go in that direction. Good-day."

And, turning upon his heel, he was about to stalk away.

The Westerner was visited at that moment with a pang of remorse at the reception he had accorded the polite young man.

He now felt certain that he had wronged him in taking him for anything but a gentleman, and believed it his duty to apologize.

"Hold on," he called in an embarrassed tone.

The young man stopped, looked back at the Westerner, hesitated, and finally asked dryly:

"Well, what is it?"

"I want to ask your pardon for acting the way I did, and to thank you for your politeness. But the fact is, I was afraid you were—"

"I see," interrupted the young man, laughing and returning to the other's side. "You took me for a bunco-steerer, didn't you?"

"Well, you see, I've heard tell of so many—"

"I know. You have heard that it is about impossible for a stranger to come here without being taken in. You aren't far wrong, and I don't blame you for being suspicious of strangers. The city is full of men—or rather, I should say, wolves in sheep's clothing, who are ever ready to pounce upon every lamb that heaves in sight. Therefore I won't presume to burden you with my company, lest you should feel uneasy. But you had better hurry if you wish to catch that boat. Good-day."

And again the young man turned away and started in a rapid walk toward the boat.

The stranger followed him in silence until they were aboard the boat, and when the young man arrived in the men's cabin he appeared to be greatly surprised to find the Westerner close behind him.

He did not deign to speak, however, and finding a seat, sat down and drawing a newspaper from his pocket, appeared to become absorbed in its contents.

The Westerner stood irresolute for some minutes, and finally stole across the cabin in a bashful way and slipped into the seat—which happened to be vacant—nearest the young man.

Here he sat for several minutes in a very uneasy state of mind, but without speaking, but finally, evidently unable to restrain himself any longer, touched the young man on the arm and said:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I hope you won't think that I believe you to be anything but a gentleman. I am sure you are, or you would never have taken the trouble to direct me as you did. I ask your pardon again for acting as I did."

"Don't mention it, my good sir," smiled the young man, dropping his paper and turning toward the stranger. "To tell you the truth, I myself am generally very chary about making the acquaintance of strangers, but there is something about your face that attracted me to you from the first. Shall we be friends?"

And he extended his hand.

"With all my heart!" replied the Westerner, grasping the proffered hand. "What you say about me I can say with equal truth about yourself. As I said, I was a little suspicious of you at first, but as soon as I took the second look at you I became convinced that you were an honest man and a gentleman."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, sir. My name is Withers—Will Withers. Might I inquire your name?"

"Certainly. My name is Laurence Sanford. My home is in San Francisco, California, and I have come on here to look for a brother of mine."

"Ah! Then perhaps I can be of service to you in assisting to find your brother," cried the young man, enthusiastically. "That is exactly in my line."

"You are a detective, then?"

"I am."

"I am glad to have met you, sir!" exclaimed Sanford, again grasping his hand. "It will save me the trouble of going to Police Headquarters—in case I cannot find my brother myself. I shall employ you in that case."

"You are very kind. Here is my card, so you will know where to find me in case you require my services."

"Thanks," said Sanford, taking the card and examining it. "I shall most likely call upon you."

"I shall do the best I can for you, if you do. By the way, how long has your brother been in New York?"

"About two weeks. That is, it is a little over two weeks since he left home."

"And you haven't heard from him since?"

"No, sir."

"Nor any clue of him?"

"Not the slightest."

"What was his business in New York?"

"He came on here to fetch some money to a niece who had inherited it."

"A large amount?"

"Something like half a million."

"In money?"

"Yes, in gold coin."

"Whew!"

"A large sum, eh?"

"Rather a large sum for a man to carry about with him. You do not think he has been foully dealt with, do you?"

"I cannot tell. I fear so."

"Did he come alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who is this girl?"

"Her name is Florence Disdale."

"Your niece?"

"Yes."

"Where does she stop in the city?"

"I do not know. That is another thing I have got to find out."

"Has she any friends in the city with whom she would be likely to stop?"

"She has a sister here, but I do not know whether she would stop with her or not."

"It is most likely that she would. Do you know where this sister lives?"

"I do not."

"You can easily find out, however, as you know her name."

"That is the trouble; I do not know her name, or rather her husband's name. She is married."

"That makes it bad," observed the young man with a sigh. "However, it is too early to despair, as we shall doubtless be able to discover her address very soon."

"I hope so."

By this time the boat had landed on the New York side, and the two men walked ashore.

"I am going to take a cab here," observed the young man, "and if you happen to be going in the same direction, you may as well get in with me. Where do you expect to stop?"

"I know of no place to stop, and was about to ask you where I had better go."

"Come with me. I am stopping at the Coleman House. It is a first rate place."

"High priced?"

"No, very reasonable."

"Very well, I will go there."

Withers called a cab and the two got in and were soon driving up-town.

It was growing dark when they reached the Coleman House, and Sanford procured a room, and went to it at once, while his young friend went to his.

They met at dinner half an hour later, however, and resumed their conversation regarding the best method of going about finding the Californian's brother and niece.

"I have thought of a plan," began Withers.

"What is it?" asked Sanford, eagerly.

"I know an old fortune-teller who is something remarkable for her power of divining secrets, and my plan is to call upon her and see what she has to say, before proceeding in any other direction."

Sanford, who was a plain, practical man, smiled at the suggestion, and surveyed his companion's countenance to discover whether he was really in earnest or not. As he had every indication of being so, however, he finally said:

"You don't take any stock in these humbugs, do you, sir?"

"Not as a rule," replied Withers earnestly, "but in the case of this woman I am compelled to make an exception. She has told me things which no mortal could ever have known, and I am bound to believe that she is endowed with some subtle power which cannot be solved by a human being."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I believe it will be a waste of time, but for the sake of curiosity, and of satisfying you, I am willing to give the old lady a trial."

"It will not take much time, and there can be no harm done, even if she is unable to reveal anything to us, while if she does, we are just that much ahead."

"No, there will be no harm done, as you say, and if she can tell us what we want to know we will have accomplished a great deal."

"You will go, then?"

"Yes."

"Very well, we shall start as soon as we are done dinner."

"Where does this wonderful dame live? In some rookery in a dismal and disreputable back street, I suppose."

"She does not reside in a palace, you may be sure," returned Withers, smiling. "You know all these people choose the worst localities in the world for their abiding places."

"I am aware of that, and that is one reason I have always avoided them."

As soon as they had finished their dinner they left the hotel, and, taking a cab, drove off, the young man directing the driver where to go.

After a drive of twenty minutes or thereabouts the cab pulled up before an old-fashioned house in a narrow, crooked street which had more the appearance of a village, with the exception of a few large warehouses, than a part of a great city.

As a matter of fact, it was no other than the old house in Greenwich Village where Burr had first seen the old man enter.

"Here we are," said the young man, springing out of the vehicle. "I hope we shall be fortunate enough to find the old dame in."

Meanwhile the Californian had been busy looking about him and surveying the old house in particular.

From the faint view he had of it in the dim light it impressed him as the most dismal looking resort he had ever beheld.

The blinds were closed as usual, and not a ray of light was visible about the place.

He climbed mechanically from the cab, still keeping his eyes fixed on the old house, and a sense of dread came over him.

Withers noticed this and laughingly remarked:

"Not a cheerful looking place, is it?"

"No," replied Sanford dryly.

"Looks like a place where a murder might be committed, doesn't it?"

Sanford shuddered, and made no reply.

He was pondering how he could make an excuse for not going in, but before he had come to any conclusion the young man, still laughing, took him by the arm and said:

"Come, let us go in. There is no danger. I hope you are not afraid, especially as I am with you?"

As a matter of truth Sanford was afraid, but his pride would not permit him to admit it, and without answering the other's inquiry, allowed himself to be led along across the little court and up the high stoop.

When they had reached the door the young man took a key from his pocket and put it into the lock.

Then a fear seized the Californian which caused him to shiver as with an ague; but still he had not the courage to refuse to go on, and Withers unlocked and opened the door.

The moment Sanford was ushered into the hall, which was in total darkness, he was in greater terror than ever.

The young man either did not notice his condition or affected not to, and taking a match from his pocket, lighted it and held it aloft to enable them to see to ascend a flight of rickety stairs which arose before them.

The young man started up the steps and the Westerner, impelled by some power which he could not comprehend, followed.

They walked rapidly, but Withers was compelled to light several fresh matches before they reached the top of the stairs.

Finally the next floor was reached and, stopping long enough to strike another match on his leg, the young man started along the gloomy passage.

Finally he came to a door and knocked on it.

There was no response, and the young man uttered a low curse as he repeated the knock.

"I wonder where the cursed old wretch is?" he muttered, as he repeated the knock for the third time.

Meanwhile Sanford's heart was thumping at such a rate that he seemed to hear its beatings.

At length Withers lost his patience and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected one by the light of the match and put it into the lock.

He soon had the door open and the Californian was ushered into a room which was dimly lighted by a candle which stood on a table in the middle of the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

WITHERS stepped into the room and Sanford followed timidly, and when he got inside glanced about him with a frightened look.

The young man did not appear to notice his state of mind, still smiled pleasantly, and, also glancing about, remarked:

"She is not here, that is plain. I wonder what has become of the old beast?"

Sanford offered no suggestion, but still continued to look about him.

The room was bare and desolate, the only furniture being a rude table and a chair or two.

There was nobody there, but the fact of the candle being burning showed that the occupant of the room had not been gone long.

Withers arrived at the same conclusion at the same moment.

"She can't be far," he suggested. "See, the candle hasn't a very long wick on it, which it would have if she had been gone any great length of time."

"That is true," admitted the Californian, and again lapsed into silence.

"Well, we may as well wait for her," hinted Withers, taking one of the chairs. "We won't be kept long, I don't believe. Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

Sanford sunk mechanically into a chair, but did not speak.

The awful stillness that followed had its effect upon the lively spirits of the young man, for he failed utterly after several attempts to keep up a conversation.

He arose after a moment or two and paced the floor, resumed his seat again and beat a tattoo on the floor with his foot, and finally took a cigar from his pocket, and after lighting it, offered the Westerner one.

Sanford was in too desperate a state of mind to refuse, as he hoped it would furnish relief to his troubled spirits.

He took the cigar and lighted it, and for a long time the two men sat there silently smoking, filling the desolate room with a blue cloud.

This had continued for several minutes, when they were suddenly aroused from their reveries by the opening of the door and the simultaneous exclamation in a shrill, feminine voice:

"Heavens alive! Where does all the smoke come from? Oh, it's you, is it?" she screeched in her strident, rasping voice, just espying the young man. "I thought—"

But she paused at that moment, for her eyes had fallen upon the stranger.

After staring at him for some seconds she turned to Withers again and demanded in an angry tone:

"Who's his Highness, Will?"

"Shut up, Moll!" ejaculated Withers, springing to his feet and grasping the old hag by the arm and giving her a vigorous shake. "Keep your mouth shut, or else learn to wag that old tongue of yours more civilly!"

"I will if I want to," muttered the old woman sullenly.

The young man appeared to think that he had gone too far, for he instantly resumed in a coaxing tone:

"Well, there, Moll, my beauty, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Let us be friends."

The old woman, who was one of the most hideous old creatures imaginable, was evidently flattered and cajoled by the appellation of "Beauty," and began to smile and glint out of her bleary old eyes in a most disgusting fashion.

"I thought you couldn't remain angry with me long," laughed the young man, chucking the old creature under the chin.

"I dunno who could," she grinned, exhibiting a set of yellow snags which did not add to her good looks in the least. "But what do you fellows want here, anyway?"

"We have come to have our fortunes told, Mollie. At least this gentleman wants his fortune told. I guess you have told me everything you know about me."

"I guess I have, and it won't take me long to tell this man all I know about him," she said, turning her cat-like eyes upon Sanford again.

"Which is as much as to say that you

don't know much about him, eh?" laughed Withers.

"Which is as much as to say that I know all about him," growled the hag.

"Well, what do you know about him, for instance?"

"I know," she replied, fixing her eyes on his, "that he is a stranger in the city, that he got in this afternoon, and that he is looking for a brother."

Sanford was startled and astonished.

How was it possible, he thought, that the woman could have known all this?

And he began to think that Withers had judged correctly when he affirmed that the old woman was endowed with wonderful powers of divination.

He stared at her without saying a word, but his face was ghastly pale.

Withers only laughed at his consternation, and asked:

"What more do you know about him, beauty?"

"I know that he has a brother lost in the city, pursued the old woman.

"When did he come, Mollie?" inquired the young man.

"About two weeks ago."

"What did he come to New York for?"

"To bring some money."

"How much?"

"Oh, a great deal."

"Can't you tell the exact amount?"

"About five hundred thousand dollars."

"Well, will this gentleman ever find his brother?"

The old woman hesitated, walked up a little closer to the Californian and looked him closely in the eye.

"Yes, he will find him after a long time," she answered.

"When?" asked the young man.

"Oh, in two or three days."

"Can't you tell just how long?"

"Well, I should say in three days at most."

"You are sure it won't be in two days?"

"No, it won't be as soon as that."

"But it may be more than three?"

"No, no more than three."

"Where is he now?"

The old woman took a step nearer and stood so close to the Californian that he could have put his hand on her by stretching it out, and appeared to be looking into the very depths of his soul.

Thus she stood for a minute or more, and appeared to be in doubt about what she saw.

Her face underwent a series of strange grimaces, her lips twitched, and she clinched and unclenched her hands in a nervous manner.

And then all of a sudden she sprang back with the exclamation:

"My God!"

"What is it, beauty?" asked Withers.

Sanford shuddered.

"He's dead!" she muttered.

"Who is dead?" demanded Sanford in a scared voice, jumping to his feet and speaking for the first time.

"Your brother," rejoined the old woman.

"I do not believe it," cried Sanford.

"It is true all the same," she maintained firmly.

"I don't believe it! I don't believe you know anything about it!"

"Nevertheless what she has told you before was true," interposed Withers; "why should you doubt that she is telling you correctly in this instance?"

"I don't believe it," persisted the Californian.

Instead of arguing the matter any further with him, Withers turned to the old woman again and asked:

"You are sure he is dead, are you?"

"Yes—sure," was the response.

"How came he by his death?"

"Murdered!" replied the old woman.

"Murdered?" screeched Sanford, raising his hands in horror and starting at the old hag.

She simply nodded her head.

He was no longer in doubt now.

The fact that she had told him correctly and the earnestness with which she had made this last announcement had had their effect, and he was convinced at last.

"Murdered?" he repeated. "Why did they murder my brother?"

"For his money—or rather the money he had in his possession," rejoined the fortune-teller.

That was enough.

It seemed impossible to him that any mortal could have told all this, unassisted by supernatural power, and he was more than ever convinced that she was telling him the truth.

Limp and dejected he sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

He remained in this attitude for a long time, forgetting about his surroundings and giving himself up wholly to his grief.

Finally his woe subsided somewhat and he gradually came to realize that it was terribly still about him.

He raised his head and looked about.

Withers and the old woman were both gone.

He was alarmed at the discovery.

What could it mean?

Was there some trickery about it, or had they merely gone away in order that he might be alone with his grief?

The latter did not appear reasonable, and his suspicions were awakened that something was wrong.

The candle was still burning, but had burned down very low and a long overflow of tallow hung down on the side.

He listened, but could hear no sound.

Next he went to the door, and, putting his ear to it, listened, but still could hear nothing.

Had they gone off and left him in that dismal place?

So it seemed, but he was determined not to remain there long, and tried the door.

It was locked.

Now he was convinced that all was not right.

He surged and tugged at the door, but it was no use. It would not come open.

Then he calculated upon the chances of bursting it open, but he soon discovered that this was impossible.

It was one of those old-fashioned doors constructed of solid oak, and was as proof against his efforts as if it had been constructed of iron.

Sanford was bewildered and almost in despair.

He now saw what a fool he had been not to have followed his first idea of refusing to enter the old house.

But it was too late to think about that now, and he turned his attention to the job of effecting his escape from the accursed place.

He knew that escape was impossible by way of the door, so he went to the solitary window in the room.

He had no trouble in raising the sash, and even succeeded in pushing open the shutters.

Then he looked down. It was not a great distance to the ground and he believed he could jump it without danger, and was about to climb out upon the ledge with that end in view, when the sash, which was held up by no weights, suddenly came down with a crash.

He took hold of the sash to raise it again, but was startled at that instant by the sound of footsteps directly behind him.

He started to turn round and ascertain who the new-comer was, when a stunning blow over the head caused him to stagger and grow dizzy, although he neither fell nor entirely lost his senses.

Sanford was a powerful man and used to hardship, so pulling himself together, he drew the only weapon he had about him—a knife—and turned upon his unknown antagonist.

He was too blind from the effects of the blow he had received over the head to notice what his antagonist was like, nor did he take the trouble to learn.

He struck out with the knife at random, but appeared unable to strike anything or anybody.

Meanwhile he was occasionally receiving a prod from a knife in the hand of his adversary, but fortunately none of them resulted seriously.

Finally Sanford received a stinging cut in the arm, and this inspired him to greater effort.

He struck out with all the strength he possessed and his knife came in contact

with something hard and broke off close to the hilt, leaving him totally unarmed.

But he still retained the hilt with the stub of blade, and with it attacked his assailant with renewed vigor.

But before he had struck a second blow he received another stunning rap from behind which caused him to reel and fall to the floor, insensible.

How long he lay thus Sanford could not tell, but when consciousness finally began gradually to return and he opened his eyes, it was to find the old hag bending over him.

She had taken the candle from the table and held it in one hand, and was glaring down into his face.

For a moment or two he lay motionless regarding the old woman and wondering the while what she intended to do.

After continuing thus for a moment or two, he made a sudden effort and sat up, in spite of the old woman's attempt to keep him on his back by clutching his arm.

When she discovered he possessed sufficient strength to get up, she fell back and scrambled to her feet.

For some moments she stood there, candle in hand, glaring down upon him, while he, still somewhat dazed from the blow, remained sitting on the floor she looking at her.

Finally he got upon his feet, and as he did so the old woman started back with a frightened face.

It was not till then that either of them spoke.

"I hope ye're not hurted," said she.

"No, I'm not as badly hurt as the cowardly wretch who struck me intended," he replied. "But tell me, who was it struck me?"

"God bless me! I don't know, sir," she whimpered.

"You were present, were you not?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you?"

"I went out for a few minutes, and when I came back I found you lying on the floor, insensible."

"Where is Withers?"

"He is gone, sir."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. Home, I reckon."

Sanford did not believe a word she said, but he did not care to discuss the matter with her, and strode toward the door with the intention of leaving the house, but just as he reached the door he was met by a man who leveled a revolver upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE DEVELOPMENTS.

Burr congratulated himself on having made fair progress in one branch of his case.

That the gang of outlaws were engaged in a conspiracy to murder the defenseless girl for the purpose of obtaining her fortune there appeared to be not the shadow of a doubt.

But there seemed to be quite another branch to the case.

The man whom he had discovered murdered in Burling Slip was undoubtedly also the victim of these villains, and it remained for him to connect them with this crime as well as the other one.

Then came another thought.

Could there be any connection between the two cases?

The coroner's inquest had failed to throw any light upon the unfortunate man's identity, and his work must therefore be begun by groping in the dark.

As he could not but believe that the two cases bore some relation to each other, he decided to devote himself to discovering as much as possible about that portion which related to the woman, hoping to make the desired discoveries in the other direction through that medium.

Early in the forenoon he made a call at 68 West Forty-third street, as he did not believe Carter would have returned yet.

Lest he might have done so, however, or that some of the gang might be there, he took the precaution before leaving the house of disguising himself as an old gentleman.

He was met at the door by a servant, to whom he handed a card engraved with the name and title—

PHIL. D. HASTINGS, M. D.

This insured him an invitation into the parlor, where he was presently joined by Mrs. Carter.

The detective could not but notice a strong resemblance between her and the invalid whom he had rescued that morning, only Mrs. Carter was evidently somewhat older.

Nevertheless she was a beautiful woman, and evidently a shrewd one.

Burr began his inquiry by telling a long story about having met Florence in California, and then asked:

"Where is your sister, Mrs. Carter?"

"She is spending a few days out in the country," replied the woman as calmly as if she had been telling nothing but the truth.

"I have heard that she has not been in very good health since coming East."

"No, my sister has not been very well since coming to New York, but we hope she will be better."

"What seems to be the matter with her?"

"We can't make out what it is."

"Doesn't the doctor know?"

"No, he is as much at a loss as the rest of us."

"What doctor have you employed?"

"His name is Ainsworth."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"No, sir, I do not, but my husband and my brother say he is a first-class physician."

"When do you expect your sister back?"

"I cannot tell when she will be back. It may be a week and it may be longer."

"Where is your husband?"

"He went to the country with my sister."

"I believe your sister inherited a large fortune a short time ago, did she not?"

"She did—that is, a small fortune."

As the lady said this she dropped her eyes and became somewhat confused.

"We were under the impression out there that the fortune was very large—about two millions, in fact."

"I do not think it is as large as that," rejoined the woman, becoming more and more confused.

"Of course, if anything should happen the property will come to you?"

"To me and my brother, I suppose."

"Has she not already made a will bequeathing the whole of it to you and your brother?"

The woman opened her eyes very wide and stared at him, amazed.

"No, I think not," she finally faltered.

"She has written to me that she has," persisted the detective.

"Well, maybe she has," she admitted timidly, "but I was not aware of it."

"Of course, this has nothing to do with your sister's illness?" he pursued.

"Sir?"

"She intimated in her letter that she believed she was being foully dealt with, and asked me to come on here and treat her, as she had no confidence in the physician you had procured for her."

The woman looked frightened.

She turned very pale and bit her lip.

"I cannot see what she meant by writing such stuff as that," she snapped, "for she certainly knew better."

"Perhaps she is inclined to be suspicious?"

"So she is," the woman answered, with an expression of relief. "She is very suspicious."

"That may account for it. Will you give me your sister's address? I wish to call upon her and see what is the matter with her, if possible."

"No, I do not know where my husband took her."

"When do you expect him back?"

"That is as uncertain as my sister's return."

"He is not likely to return to-day, then?"

"I hardly think he will."

He was about to submit another question, when the sound of some one putting a key in the lock of the front door startled the woman and, without taking time to excuse herself, she hastened from the room.

She had neglected, in her excitement, to close the parlor door, however, and the detective saw her meet a man in the hall, whom he recognized at once as the man they called Carter at the Greenwich Village house.

Before she had time to utter a word of warning the man blurted out:

"Well, the devil's to pay now, Polly!"

She appeared equally oblivious to the fact that there was a listener near, for she asked:

"What's the matter, John?"

"Florence's gone," he replied.

"Gone? Where?"

"God only knows. We left her in the room up-stairs, and when we returned half an hour later, expecting to find her too far gone for recovery, she was gone."

"Do you suppose she got up and went of her own accord?"

"Nonsense! She was too far gone for that, I tell you. Some one has helped her to escape."

"Were there any traces?"

"Yes, we found the window open and a ladder against the side of the house."

"That reminds me—Great Heaven!" she suddenly exclaimed, turning pale.

And then springing at the door, she closed it with a bang.

But it was no use.

Burr was up and had his ear to the key-hole instantly.

Here, notwithstanding the couple in the hall conversed in subdued voices, he could hear nearly everything they said.

"What's the matter?" demanded the husband evidently wondering at the strangeness of her action.

"There is somebody in there who—"

"Somebody in there?" interrupted the husband, irritably. "Who is it?"

"A doctor. His name is Hastings."

"What does he want?"

"He used to know Florence in San Francisco, and came to inquire about her."

"The devil! I'll bet a hundred dollars he's a detective in disguise!" ejaculated Carter in a furious tone. "If he is, he won't get out of this house alive!"

"Oh, no, John, I do not think he is a detective. He appears to be an honest old fellow. But the trouble is, Florence has been writing to him about her illness, and—"

"What has she been writing?" he interrupted quickly.

"She told him that she was afraid that we were practicing some sort of foul play, and that she wished him to come on and treat her, as she had no confidence in the physician we had procured for her."

"That convinces me more than ever that he is a detective," growled the man. "I shall see him at once."

With that Burr heard him start toward the door.

"I shouldn't have any words with him till I found out whether my suspicions were correct or not," pleaded the woman.

"I know what to do," muttered her husband. "Let me go!"

Burr expected trouble, so as he slipped back to his seat he prepared himself for an assault, in case the man should decide upon any such a move.

His revolver was in his side pocket, and he put his hand in and grasped it in such a way that he could draw it at a second's notice, if necessary.

He had returned to his seat none too soon.

The next instant the door burst open and the man stood before him.

Carter was in a heat of passion, and was compelled to pause to recover his breath before he was able to speak.

Meanwhile Burr had risen, and stood smiling blandly and as cool as ice.

"Well, sir!" began Carter, glaring at him. "Who are you, and what do you want here?"

"As to the first question," replied the detective in a calm voice, "your lady can probably inform you, as she received my card. And as to the other question, I have already told her, and it will not be necessary to repeat it."

"It will be necessary to repeat it, if you value your neck!" roared the irate man. "I'll have you to know that I am master of this house!"

"Nobody disputes that," rejoined Burr in freezing tones, "but that does not prevent you from acting like a gentleman."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I do not act like a gentleman, sir?" snorted Carter meaningly, starting toward the detective.

"There is no insinuation about it," answered Burr dryly. "I tell you plainly that your conduct is not that of a gentleman!"

Carter, who was a little man, scarcely half

the size of the detective, made a rush at him, but was held in restraint by his wife.

"Let me at him!" he yelled. "I'll eat him alive if I get at him!"

"Oh, no, you won't," smiled the detective. "Let me at him!" continued to yell the little man.

"Be calm, John," implored his wife.

"I won't be calm!"

Burr laughed.

"You are making a great fool of yourself about nothing," he said. "You will gain nothing by this nonsense. The fact that I know all about your attempt to murder your sister-in-law shouldn't excite you like that."

This hint had a strange effect on the little man.

He stared at the detective for an instant, and then cooling down all of a sudden, approached him and whispered:

"Let me have a word with you in private, sir."

Then turning to his wife, he said:

"Polly, leave us. I wish to speak to this gentleman."

The woman left the room, and Burr wondered what the little man's game was.

The latter led the way into a small room back of the parlor.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DESPERATE ALTERNATIVE.

As soon as the two men were seated in the little room Carter turned suddenly upon the detective and began:

"Now, be square with me and tell me the truth; are you a doctor, as you told my wife, or are you what I suspect, a detective?"

Burr could not imagine what his motive could be for asking the question, but that he had some motive was clear, and that it was prejudicial to himself was equally clear.

The detective was prepared for any emergency, but it might not be well for the success of his case to be too frank with this man.

Therefore he smiled blandly at the fellow's question and replied:

"Why, my dear sir, I am a doctor, as I told your wife. Why should I come here if I were anything else?"

"I did not know but you might be a detective, and—"

"Why should I molest you if I were a detective?"

"I don't know," rejoined the other, considerably abashed. "But they are very fond of prying about, you know."

"I know they are, but an honest man need not be put out about such a thing. Why should you care, for instance? Because I happened to mention what your sister-in-law wrote me about fearing that you were slowly poisoning her, ought not cause you any uneasiness if the charge is false?"

At the reiteration of this charge the little man flared up and became greatly agitated.

"Did she write you that?" he fumed.

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"She said that when she came here she was enjoying the best of health, but that she had been here but a little while when she took sick and has not been well since, and that she believed her malady was attributable to some species of slow poison which was being administered by you and her sister."

"She's a fool! The climate here doesn't seem to agree with her, that is all. We have had one of the best doctors in the city attending her, but as the doctor himself says, she will have to go out of this climate before she will ever be a well woman."

"Who is this doctor?"

"His name is Ainsworth."

"Ainsworth?" exclaimed the detective with well simulated horror. "Not old Manfred Ainsworth?"

"I believe that is his name," rejoined the other, "but he stands very high as a physician in this city."

"I am surprised at that, inasmuch as he has never been admitted to their medical association here, besides he has the reputation of being one of the most unmiti-

gated scoundrels that ever went unhung. You must have known that when you employed him?"

"Certainly I did not," cried the little man excitedly.

"Then you do not keep posted in your local matters. The man has not been out of prison six months."

"You astonish me. I understood he was a first-class man and a good doctor."

"In that case you are innocent of any intention of wrong, but where is Florence now?"

"I do not know."

"Was she not in your charge?"

"She was, but she has disappeared, and I do not know where she is at present."

"But your wife told me you had taken her to the country. You must know where she is."

"I do not, I tell you."

"Did she not tell you where she was going?"

"No, she left without my knowledge."

"She was well enough to go about without assistance, then?"

"No, that is the strange thing about it. We thought she was helpless."

"So she must have had assistance?"

"Yes."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"I have an idea who it was."

"Who is he?"

"I do not wish to say just now, but if I run across him it will not be well for him!"

"An enemy, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And a friend of Florence's?"

"I don't know about that. I shouldn't think so."

"I guess he is, and in my opinion he is the same person she has written me about."

The little man was startled at this hint.

"What did she write you?" he demanded, with a frightened face.

"She said there was a detective working on her case, and that he had succeeded in making some startling discoveries."

"What kind of discoveries?"

"Perhaps I had better not tell you."

"Why not?"

"It might hurt your feelings."

"Then this fellow claims to have discovered something reflecting upon my character?"

"Slightly."

"I should like to meet him! I would reflect on him in a different manner."

"He is evidently a brave fellow, for he told me he intended to see you before this day was over."

The little man sprung to his feet.

"You have met him, then?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At Police Headquarters."

"Did he say anything about me?"

"Yes. A good deal."

"What?"

"As I said, I might hurt your feelings."

"Never mind that. Tell me," cried the little man, eagerly.

He was thoroughly worked up now.

Burr's sly innuendoes had had the effect they were designed to have.

The fellow was willing to forfeit feelings or anything else to have his curiosity satisfied.

"Why," responded the detective in slow, measured tones, "he said that you had made the girl unconscious, and while in that state you had carried her away into the country. That you had then taken this rascally doctor out with the intention of having him finish the work he had begun—of putting her to death. That the fatal dose had, in fact, been administered, but that the detective had rescued her in time."

"My God!"

The exclamation was involuntary.

Carter realized his mistake a moment later and tried to rectify it by resorting to a forced laugh.

"This is a pretty story," he said lightly. "Of course you put no faith in it?"

"I shall take it for what it is worth until I hear the facts," answered the detective coolly.

"That's right, and we will give you the facts."

"That will hardly be sufficient to satisfy me."

"Where will you get them, then?"

"From Florence herself."

"That will not be possible."

"Why?"

"She is dead—no, no—I mean—"

"I understand what you mean, thoroughly," interposed the detective. "You mean that, wherever she is, you are in hopes that the dose administered by this scoundrel of a doctor has done its work, and that the girl is beyond the power of relating any disagreeable facts she may have had in her possession."

"No, sir! I meant nothing of the kind. What I meant was—"

"However," interrupted the detective, disregarding his desperate attempt at an explanation, "I have the satisfaction of knowing that she is not dead; that she is safe in a first-class hospital where she will receive the best of treatment, and that she is now in a fair way to recover."

Carter had grown terribly calm.

Pale and limp and trembling in every fiber of his frame, he sat speechless in his chair, staring vacantly at the detective.

"This detective has also given me other points," pursued Burr.

"For God's sake, what—"

"He claims to have shadowed a fellow—a tramp, apparently—last night from somewhere down town to your door," interrupted the detective, still disregarding the other's remark, "and he says that he saw the tramp hand your wife a letter."

"Well, what of that? Is there anything out of the way about a messenger bringing a letter?"

The fellow had regained something of his self-assurance.

"Oh, no," replied Burr. "Certainly not. Only some people are inclined to look with suspicion upon the act of one man's wife receiving a letter by special messenger from another man."

"That letter did not come from another man, sir."

Carter, in his desperation, was fast losing his head again.

"No?"

"No, sir!"

"Then perhaps it was from you?"

"It was."

"In that case you can perhaps explain the presence of blood on the envelope?"

The little man jumped to his feet.

His excitement had got the better of him.

"What do you know about that, sir?"

But the words were no more than out of his mouth than he again saw his error, and made a desperate effort at hedging.

"How do I know anything about it?" queried Burr.

"I did not mean that," said Carter, dropping back into his chair again. "I meant to say that there was no blood on the envelope."

"That is strange," said the detective, musingly. "I wonder what your wife could have meant by the exclamation, on receiving the letter, 'Why, there is blood on this envelope!' then?"

"She made no such exclamation, or if she did, she was in jest," asserted the little man.

"The detective says differently. He asserts that she looked the picture of horror as she spoke, and that when she asked the messenger to explain the presence of the blood, he laughed and told her she had better ask those who knew."

"Your detective is a liar!" growled Carter. "No such—"

"He says, furthermore," again interrupted Burr, "that he stopped the messenger as he descended the stoop, and asked him to explain the matter, and that the latter disavowed any knowledge of the cause of the blood being on the envelope, and said that he had received the letter from a man by the name of Harry Disdale, in a cafe in Nassau street."

"Did Mickey—"

"What?"

The fellow was so flurried now that he did not know what he was saying.

He recognized that he had made another bad break, however, and it only had the effect of increasing his agitation.

He jumped from his seat and began to pace the floor.

"Yes, that is what Mickey Mallon told the detective," pursued Burr with a mis-

chievous grin on his face. "He also said that he believed the man who gave him the letter had been guilty of killing a man in Burling Slip that very night. Of course he must have been mistaken about this, if you gave him the letter."

The little man was about to reply, when a knock at the door caused him to pause.

As he opened the door Burr caught a glimpse of Harry Disdale, but Carter slipped quickly through the door and closed it after him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW TURN OF AFFAIRS.

THE door had no more than closed before the detective had his ear to it, as he had had to the other door.

An excited whispered conversation was going on in the next room.

He could not make out what the nature of it was, but he ascertained that there were three or more persons engaged in it, and that they were greatly excited over something.

In vain did the detective strain his ear to catch a single word.

Even had they spoken louder, the confusion caused by their all talking at once made it impossible for him to catch any one word or sentence clearly.

But as he listened and the men continued to talk, they began to grow less guarded and speak louder and he to catch a word here and there.

At length he heard one say:

"Yes, I do know. The hackman told me."

Then came a jumble which was entirely unintelligible, and presently the detective caught the words "Thirty-fourth street."

This was sufficient.

He had heard enough to tell him the nature of the conversation. They were discussing the disappearance of Florence Disdale, and from this last remark he knew that they had discovered where she had been taken.

This discovery filled him with anticipation.

Having discovered the girl's whereabouts, they would doubtless take advantage of his absence to overpower those in charge and again abduct her.

If he could only get out of the place he was in without the knowledge of the ruffians, he thought, he would soon put an end to their scheme.

But how was this to be done?

He looked about for some means of escape but the only outlet to the little room, aside from a window, was the door opening into the room where the men were.

He examined the window.

He found that he could raise it without any trouble, and did so. But it only opened into a narrow passage between the house he was in and the next one.

The passage had no outlet, so far as he could see.

Nevertheless, he decided to try it.

But again he hesitated.

Would that be a wise course?

Would it not be better to walk boldly out into the next room and try to effect his escape before they were aware of his presence?

This appeared to be the wiser course, as he might get into the narrow passage and not be able to get out.

He was about to open the door, when it suddenly flew open and the four men, Carter, Disdale, the old doctor and the hunchback, stood before him.

Even then he was unabashed and determined to make his escape by rushing past them, but as he was about to do so Harry Disdale coolly presented a revolver and pointed it at his breast with the calm command:

"Not so fast, old man! We have business with you."

But if the young rascal had counted on intimidating the brave detective, he had mistaken his man.

Burr stepped back, but abated nothing of his coolness.

He bowed and even smiled at the furious-looking group.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said in an unconcerned tone. "I was not aware that I

was to be prevented from going about my business in this manner. Perhaps you can explain your conduct?"

"We can, and that very quickly," growled Disdale, losing something of his coolness in the face of the detective's *sang froid*. "We have been informed that you are the same fellow who has been interfering with our affairs for the past twenty-four hours, and we wish to have an explanation from you."

"With pleasure," rejoined the detective, still smiling. "What do you wish to know?"

"We wish to know what you mean by interfering with our private affairs," snorted the young man, growing more and more excited.

"I am not aware that I have done anything of the kind."

"Do you mean to say that it was not you who abducted my sister last night?"

"Abducted your sister?" said the detective with well-feigned astonishment.

"Those were my words," retorted the other.

"Then I am unable to comprehend them, being innocent of the charge you prefer against me."

"You lie!" shouted Disdale, flourishing his pistol in Burr's face.

"Thanks. But your assertion and vilification prove nothing except that you are a ruffian."

"You dare to tell me that to my face?"

"Why not? It is true."

"Don't you know that I am liable to shoot you down like a dog, sir?"

"No, I apprehend nothing of the kind. A ruffian is usually a coward, which I know you to be."

This had the effect Burr desired.

The young man became so excited and agitated with rage that his hand began to tremble, and that was the detective's opportunity.

Before any of them anticipated what he was about to do he had his own revolver leveled upon them.

"Step aside!" he cried authoritatively.

As he uttered the words he made a move toward them, flourishing his revolver in their faces.

In an instant they were seized with panic.

The four men fell back with blanched faces and the detective strode past them.

In another instant he was in the hall and about to make his escape, when he was suddenly confronted with an unexpected difficulty.

Having got past the four men, he had no thought of meeting any one else, and was consequently off his guard.

But as he was about to pass the parlor door where he had first entered, a woman stepped out in front of him and pointed a revolver at his head.

"Another step and you are a dead man!" she cried in a low, terrible voice.

It was Mrs. Carter.

The detective was entirely unprepared to meet her.

From her timidity of the night before he would not have believed her capable of such heroism.

He stood abashed.

His hand was on his cocked revolver, but he dare not draw it, especially on a woman.

"Throw up your hands!" she cried in the same cold, fearless tone. "Those men are too cowardly to intercept you, but you will find that I am made of different metal!"

A moment of panic, and the detective's self-possession returned to him.

He smiled, as was his wont under such circumstances.

And it had the never failing effect.

He saw her losing her nerve.

"What do you want, madam?" he asked in the coolest manner possible.

"I want you to march back into that room!" she screeched.

"What is that for?" he questioned in the same polite tone.

"My husband wishes to speak to you," she explained.

But her coolness was rapidly forsaking her.

Burr laughed derisively.

"I imagined he had had enough of me," he smiled.

"Well, he hasn't," she retorted.

Burr saw, or thought he saw the motive of the action then.

There was an object in killing as much time as possible for some purpose.

Perhaps while he was being detained there some of the ruffians were engaged in carrying the girl away from his house.

The thought of such a thing rendered him more anxious to get away than ever.

And he was determined to gain his object at all hazards.

"What does he wish to see me about now?" he asked, by way of throwing her off her guard.

"You will have to ask him."

"Very well," he said, as coolly as ever.

So saying, he turned upon his heel as if intending to return to the room.

This threw her off her guard, as he expected, and she lowered her weapon.

He remarked the action out of the corner of his eye, as was his habit, and before she had time to think he turned upon her and snatched the revolver out of her hands.

She was so astonished that she was unable to make any outcry or offer any resistance.

"I will now bid you a very good day!" he said in his suavest tone, and strode toward the door.

But his troubles were not yet at an end.

As he opened the door to depart he was surprised to find the four men confronting him.

Disdale had regained his self-assurance and smiled as blandly as the detective had done on him.

"Not so fast, old fellow," smiled the young man, pointing a revolver at his breast. "We still have the drop on you, you see."

"So you have," replied the detective with cool complacency. "A little unexpectedly, too. I was under the impression that you had had enough of me some time ago."

But his coolness did not have the same effect this time that it had had before.

The young man still retained his nerve and still smiled.

"I'll just ask you to drop that pistol," he went on. "You may have the audacity to disarm a woman, but you have men to deal with this time."

"So I remark," rejoined Burr pleasantly, "and I shall be only too glad to oblige you by surrendering the weapon."

With that he handed over the pistol he had taken from the woman.

"Once more," pursued the young man.

"Eh?"

"You have another revolver in your pocket, or more for aught I know. Hand them out, and be quick about it!"

Burr was in a quandary.

He knew the fellow was aware of his having a revolver and it was no use to deny it.

But if he surrendered he would put himself completely at their mercy.

What was to be done?

He hesitated, and the young man noticing it, suspected his motive.

"No nonsense!" he cried. "Out with that gun, or I'll let you have a taste of mine!"

"Certainly, with pleasure," rejoined the detective.

And he put his hand in his pocket for the weapon.

Disdale watched him closely.

Burr drew out the revolver, turned the butt toward the young man as if he intended giving it to him, and then just as Disdale put out his hand for it, he suddenly turned the weapon and leveled it at his head.

"I'll just ask you to drop your own pistol," he said with a smile.

The young man was stricken with panic.

He staggered back and would have run had it not been for the presence of mind of old Ainsworth.

"What's the matter with your manhood, Disdale?" he grumbled. "Four against one, and about to run?"

And quicker than thought he leveled his own revolver at the detective.

This was quickly followed by the other three doing the same thing, and in an instant Burr found himself covered with four revolvers.

CHAPTER XV.

A SET BACK.

It appeared to be all up with Burr now.

It was folly to resist such overpowering

members, and there were but two alternatives before him.

He must either surrender or use some stratagem to escape or defeat his enemies.

But what stratagem could he adopt?

Time was precious.

He thought rapidly.

In order to get from the parlor, where he had left the four men, to the front stoop, where they were at present, it had evidently been necessary for them to pass through the basement of the building.

Why could not he adopt the same course?

He could do no more than fail at the worst, and determined to try.

He had thought all this over in the fraction of a minute, and then his mind was made up.

Making a sudden spring backward, the detective discharged his revolver into the group without taking any aim or caring whom he hit or whether he had hit anybody.

His idea was to create a panic among them by the unexpected action and give himself a chance to get started.

The smoke and report of the unexpected shot had the desired effect.

The men were thrown into a state of temporary panic.

Taking advantage of the situation, he took to his heels and ran with all speed toward the rear of the hall.

Fortunately for him, they had left the door leading to the basement open.

Burr darted through, and down the stairs he went several steps at a bound.

In a moment he was at the bottom.

His course seemed clear now.

There was but one chance against him.

If the ruffians should surmise his stratagem they might head him off.

He neared the area door, and then paused an instant to listen.

He could hear the men running along the hall overhead.

This was a good omen.

In their excitement it had never occurred to them to lay for him at the front door.

Their idea appeared to be to follow him, and so the coast was clear.

Burr tried the door.

It was locked.

And what was worse, the key was gone.

What was to be done?

He was in a trap.

It was in vain that he looked about for something with which to break the lock.

There was nothing on hand, and to make matters worse, he could already hear the men descending the rear stairs.

They would be upon him in a minute.

The detective was almost in despair.

There seemed but one way out of it now, and that was to stand his ground and fight.

He had the advantage of the basement hall being tolerably dark, which would prevent his enemies from seeing him very clearly when coming suddenly into it from the light, while he who had been there longer, and looking toward the light, would have no trouble in seeing them.

This was the plan, then, and once more drawing his revolver, he backed into a corner, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

In another instant his pursuers were upon him.

They came tearing down like wild animals in pursuit of prey.

But he noticed that there were but three of them.

His shot had evidently taken effect on one of them.

This was some advantage.

When the trio were within a few feet of him the detective blazed away.

He had not taken much aim, nevertheless one of his enemies uttered a terrific yell, threw up his hands and reeled to the floor.

This left only Disdale and the old man for him to deal with, but he knew them to be the most formidable of the lot.

And, instead of being intimidated by the loss of their comrade, the circumstance seemed only to fire them with renewed courage and desperate determination.

The old man in particular, had the appearance of a ferocious beast as he uttered a low growl and bounded toward the detec-

tive, while his small black eyes flashed like a pair of torches.

All this had taken but an instant of time, and the detective fired a second shot.

He had aimed at neither one in particular, but the men were so close together that that made little difference.

The old man uttered a cry of pain, indicating that he had received the shot, but he did not so much as stagger, and came on.

Again the detective fired, but this time his aim was defective, and the shot went wide of its mark.

And then, before he had time to repeat the operation, his enemies were too close to him to permit the use of his pistol.

Like a maddened tiger springing on its prey, the old man bounded forward and clutched the detective.

He had aimed at Burr's throat, but the latter was too agile to permit of that, and the old villain only succeeded in grasping a hold upon the breast of his coat.

But his bony fingers were like rods of steel.

It was in vain that the detective attempted to tear him loose.

The old man clung like death.

Burr had but one alternative, and that was to beat the old rascal over the head with the reverse end of his revolver, and he got in one or two effective whacks, but at that juncture Drisdale came to his companion's assistance.

Occupied as he was with the old man, Burr was unable to watch the movements of Drisdale, and that individual succeeded in securing the detective's arms in his own vise-like grasp.

His struggle to release himself from the young man again withdrew his attention from the old man, and the latter succeeded in his first intension, and clutched the detective by the throat.

With his hands secured and a firm grip on his windpipe, there appeared little hope for Burr now.

Nevertheless he struggled on with the strength of desperation, and finally made out to free one of his hands.

Happily, it was the right hand, and he was quick to make good use of it by grasping old Ainsworth, who was directly in front of him, by the throat.

His terrific grip soon had the effect of loosening that of the old man, and following up the advantage by planting a vigorous kick in the latter's stomach which sent him reeling to the floor, he turned his attention exclusively to Drisdale.

The two were about evenly matched.

Both were giants of strength and endurance, and the struggle promised to be a severe one.

Burr was the best athlete, however, and was not long in throwing his man.

Once upon the ground, the detective took a murderous grip on his antagonist's windpipe, and was fast reducing him to a state of insensibility.

But just when victory appeared sure, there came a set back.

The old man, who had recovered somewhat from the blow he had received, and fired with renewed vigor by his fury, had picked up one of the revolvers which had fallen to the ground and began to belabor the detective over the head with it.

Burr realized that he could not hold out long against this sort of treatment, and attempted to get away from the man beneath him and regain his feet.

But it was no use.

The instant he released his grip on Disdale's throat the latter clutched his and held him firmly where he was.

Meanwhile the old man was raining blows upon his head with the butt of the revolver.

Finally he struck a more vigorous blow than usual, and that in the vicinity of the temple, and the detective instantly rolled over, insensible.

What happened after that was lost to him.

His first consciousness brought him to the realization that he was bound hand and foot, and that he was in a dark place.

He could not imagine where he was.

Had he been insensible long enough for it to have grown dark? he mused.

He attempted to move, but found that he was so firmly pinioned that he could not.

Not only were his hands and feet bound, but he was fastened to the floor.

This was the work of the fiends, his enemies.

But why had they spared his life?

It would have been no more for them to murder him than it had been to kill the man in Burling Slip, and attempt to kill the young woman.

They evidently had some motive in keeping him a prisoner without killing him.

But what was it?

Meanwhile he must devote himself to securing his release.

By slowly but vigorously wriggling his wrists he found that the cords were loosened, and this encouraged him to renew his efforts in this direction.

But it was a slow and painful undertaking.

Minute after minute went by, and his wrists were fast waxing raw and sore from the severe ordeal, but he paused at nothing.

His liberty was worth everything else, especially just then, when the life of the girl depended upon it.

He struggled on, and at last his efforts were rewarded by the release of one hand.

He now felt about his person in the hope that his enemies might have left him his knife.

But alas! they had left him nothing.

They had stripped him of everything of value he possessed.

If he wished to extricate himself, therefore, he must do it with whatever natural faculties he possessed.

Having his right hand at liberty, however, somewhat simplified matters.

By dint of tugging and picking he finally succeeded in releasing his other hand also, and nothing was left but the cords on his feet and a stout rope which was wound about his waist and secured him to a ring in the floor.

Applying himself to the work of unfastening his feet first, he was not long in attaining his object, and he then turned his attention to the rope about his waist.

This was not so light an obstacle.

The rope appeared to be a new one, and was tied in a series of complicated knots that only a sailor could untie.

His only hope appeared to be in stretching it enough to allow him to slip out of it.

He therefore threw his whole strength against it, and was gratified to find it yielding.

Encouraged by this to renewed exertion, he continued to work, and soon the loop had grown large enough for him to slip out of it.

Once more he was a free man so far as the ropes were concerned, and the next thing was to find what sort of a prison they had confined him in.

Groping about, he soon discovered that his cell was of narrow limits, and he guessed from the nature of the walls that it was no more than an ordinary closet.

He felt for the door and found it, but, as he expected, it was locked.

However, it was of such frail stuff that he had no trouble in bursting it open.

But what was his horror, on stepping out, to find himself once more confronted by three of his enemies!

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

BURR was dumfounded at the appearance of his enemies.

He had hoped to escape them this time, especially as he had no arms.

But there they were, each armed with revolvers.

It looked as if the jig was up.

Disdale, who was in the lead, smiled as usual, and said:

"You haven't got away so easily as you thought for, eh, young man?"

This change in the appellation of young man instead of old man, as he had addressed him before, caused the detective instinctively to put his hand to his face, when to his astonishment he found his false gray beard gone.

The action caused the three ruffians to laugh.

"You're surprised to find your whiskers gone, eh?" said Disdale, banteringly. "You

have grown a good deal younger since yesterday."

Since yesterday?

Was it possible that he had been insensible so long?

It was not till then that the detective realized that he was very weak, and no doubt the cause was a want of food.

"Come, get back into your cage!" ordered Disdale. "We are not through with you yet."

Unarmed, he could do nothing but obey.

Resistance under the circumstances would have been the height of folly.

So he turned, despondent and broken-hearted, and walked back into the prison which it had cost him such labor to escape from.

When he reached the interior of the closet again Disdale was close upon his heels.

Burr was startled by the sound of clanking chains, and looked about in alarm.

The young man held a pair of handcuffs and a pair of gyves for his ankles.

The villain laughed at his look of astonishment.

"You need not be surprised," he said coolly. "We propose to secure you this time so that there will be no chance of your escaping. Hold out your wrists."

Burr sullenly refused to comply.

But the other two men stepped in and, with the combined strength of the three, in his weak condition, it was no difficult thing for them to handcuff him.

"You see, it would be as well for you to obey when I tell you anything," banteringly observed the young man. "We are not people who are in the habit of allowing any nonsense."

He was then forced upon his back on the floor and the shackles placed on his ankles.

Nor were they satisfied with this.

"Fetch that chain," commanded Disdale.

"It is right here," chuckled the hunchback, who put in an appearance at that moment for the first time.

"All right, let me have it."

And when the chain was handed to him, the young man fastened it around the detective's waist by means of a padlock, and then running the other end through the ring in the floor, fastened it in the same manner.

"I guess you'll not get out of that quite so easily," laughed Disdale. "You may slip a rope, but you will find it different with regard to a chain."

Burr made no response.

He was too much cast down just then to talk.

It looked as though his time had come.

He was already half famished for want of food, and now he was to undergo another siege of fasting.

This, then, appeared to be their plan—to starve him to death.

If he had had any doubt upon this point, a remark of one of the men, as they took their departure, was sufficient to convince him.

"He'll not be in much shape to resist the next time, much less make his escape," chuckled the hunchback, "after he has remained in there without grub for another twenty-four hours."

"I should say not," laughed Disdale.

The party then left the place and he heard them nailing a board across the broken door, as if there was the slightest chance of his escape, even had the door been wide open.

When left to himself the detective's thoughts were of the gloomiest nature.

Would he ever see daylight again?

Would he ever see the faces of his wife and children?

There appeared little hope that he ever would.

These and a thousand other gloomy thoughts thronged his teeming brain as he lay there helpless on his back, chained like a felon or wild animal in his cage.

And then he thought of the poor helpless girl.

The villains had doubtless carried her away long ere this, and in all probability had succeeded in their nefarious scheme of murdering her.

Thus the time wore, or rather dragged on.

And amidst it all he could not drive away the haunting, agonizing recollection that he

was slowly famishing for want of food—starving to death, the most terrible of all deaths.

How long he had lain there he had no power of calculating.

It seemed like days, but had probably been a few hours, when the sound of footsteps greeted his ears.

It was just outside of his prison, and he believed it was some one coming to him.

Who could it be, and what did the person want?

Was it possible that one of the ruffians had had a twinge of conscience, and was bringing him food?

The gnawing of his stomach naturally gave birth to the thought, and wild as was the fancy, visions of steaks and chops instantly began to float before his mental vision.

Meanwhile the sound of the person outside apparently cautiously prying off the board which had been nailed on by the men.

There could be no doubt any longer that the person intended to come to him.

But for what purpose?

Was it, as he had thought and hoped, to bring him food, or was it to put him out of his misery by instant death?

Even the latter would be preferable to his present condition.

In a short time, although the person at the door had stopped many times, possibly to listen, the board was removed, the door opened and the person approached him.

It was evidently very dark in the room in which the closet was located now, for after the door was opened no light came in.

Presently he realized that the strange visitor was stooping over him, and then the rustle of skirts and the delicate touch of a soft hand told him that the visitor was a woman.

Who could she be?

Certainly it could not be the same one who had stopped him in the hall with a cocked revolver?

That woman, he was convinced, would never have been visited by a twinge of conscience.

But his doubts were put to flight just then by a low whisper in his ear:

"Mr. Burr!" came the whisper.

Where had he heard that voice?

It resembled that of Florence, but it surely could not be she.

"I have come to rescue you," pursued the voice, "as you did me."

There could no longer be any doubt about it now.

It was Florence.

"Is that you, Miss Disdale?" he asked, almost afraid to trust the testimony of his own hearing.

"Yes. But for Heaven's sake, do not even whisper my name here! How are you bound?"

"In a manner I fear you will be unable to undo," he replied despondently, "with chains and shackles."

"I anticipated as much, and have come prepared. But I must make a light."

"Is not that dangerous?"

"Yes, but we must risk everything for your liberty, for mine depends upon it."

She then lighted a bit of candle she held in her hand.

With the first ray of light he instinctively looked up into her face.

It was even more pale and haggard than when he had last seen it, but there was more animation and indication of strength.

She started when she caught a glimpse of the detective's face.

"Horrors!" she exclaimed. "They have wounded you."

"Yes," he returned. "I had a hard fight of it, and the worst is they overpowered me at last."

"I don't wonder at it. Four to one."

But she was not idle in the mean time.

She worked as she talked.

She had taken a small bottle from her pocket and was pouring a few drops of its contents on various places on his chains and shackles.

Burr watched her operations curiously.

"What are you doing?" he finally questioned.

"Don't you see?" she smiled. "This is nitric acid. It will eat away your bonds in a little while."

"Brave and thoughtful girl!" he could not

refrain from uttering. "But how did you learn the use of this powerful acid?"

"Oh, I know a thing or two," she said lightly. "But let us not talk here. There is no telling who may be listening."

The detective fell into silence and watched the earnest little chemist as she went about her task.

After going over all the parts she wished to cut, she went back and repeated the application.

Burr remained silent for a long time, but at last his curiosity got the better of him, and he asked:

"How did you manage to make your escape? You were a prisoner too?"

"Yes, I was a prisoner," she whispered softly. "But for goodness sake, wait till we get away from here before you ask me to explain how I made my escape!"

Again he dropped into silence, and the little sorcerer went on with her work.

Pretty soon she began to try the strength of the parts she had anointed.

"Not yet," she said cheerfully. "Pretty soon, though."

She was silent for some moments, and then resumed suddenly:

"I guess I have no further use for the light, and as long as it burns we are in danger of being discovered by it."

With that she blew out the candle.

It was dreadfully dark, and the detective felt her shudder as she crouched near him on the floor.

After another long wait she again tried the shackles, and this time he knew by the little screech of triumph which escaped her that she had succeeded, and that the irons were falling apart.

"I knew the stubborn old things could not withstand this acid long," she whispered gleefully.

She busied herself then by groping about in the darkness for the burned portions of the irons, and as fast as she came to them, she snapped them asunder with her delicate, little hands.

Finally the last link and shackle had been broken, and she whispered:

"You are free! Come!"

But, although he was free, it was no easy task for him to regain his feet.

His joints were stiffened by his long confinement and the lying on the hard floor, and then he was so weak from want of food that he scarcely had strength to raise himself.

But he finally managed to stagger to his feet, and arm-in arm with his fair rescuer, he started to leave the place.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPE.

WHEN Sanford found himself confronted by this new arrival his first feeling was akin to that of despair.

He was already overcome with his late exertion, and although he had suffered very little loss of blood, he was extremely weak and, being unarmed, he saw no chance to defend himself.

This feeling lasted for an instant only, however, and gave place to one of desperate determination.

He knew that it would be useless for him to contend with the man there, though, and beat a hasty retreat into the room.

As he did so, his eye fell upon the knife of the would-be assassin who had knocked him down.

He picked it up and turned toward the door again.

To his surprise the man had vanished, closing the door behind him.

Sanford was in a quandary now.

Would the man be waiting for him outside, and if so, what would be his chances against him in the dark hall?

As he had a knife and the other a revolver, the Californian concluded that his chances for success in the darkness would be very good, and he at once strode toward the door.

It was locked, and he turned to the old woman.

"Give me the key to this door," he demanded.

The hag shook her head.

"I haven't got any key," she said.

"You lie, you old villain!" he cried.

"You must have the key, or you could not have got in awhile ago. Give it to me, or I'll bury this knife in you!"

"I'll swear I have no key," she protested. "How did you get in here awhile ago, then?"

"Not with a key," she answered, growing scared.

This was a hint for Thad.

There was some other way of opening the door.

"Very well," he said. "Open the door with whatever devilish means you have for doing so. I don't care so long as it is opened."

The old woman hesitated.

"Open it, I say!" he repeated, approaching her and raising the knife over her head. "Open that door, or by Heaven, I'll murder you this instant!"

"Don't kill me! Please don't kill me!" she pleaded piteously. "I'll open the door for you."

"Well, see that you do, and don't be long about it, either."

She moved toward the door, but when she was within a few feet of it she again hesitated, turned and looked back, and finally whined:

"I'll open it if you say so, sir, but it will be better not. I would rather for your sake not to do it."

"Why for my sake?" he asked curiously.

"They are waiting outside, and will kill you the instant you step out."

Sanford did not know whether to believe her or not, but he did not want her to think he was afraid, and said:

"Never mind about me. I'll take care of myself. You open that door!"

"Certainly, if you insist, but I wish you wouldn't ask me to. I have saved your life once, and I would like to do it again. Wait just a little while and I'll get you out, but please don't go out that way, for I know you will be killed."

There was an earnestness in the old woman's voice and manner that he could not entirely disregard, and yet he did not know whether to trust her or not.

"How do you know they are waiting for me outside?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Because I heard them say so," she replied.

"Who?"

"The men."

"Who are they?"

"Don't ask me that, for I cannot tell you."

"But you know?"

"Suppose I do, I do not dare to tell."

"Why?"

"They would kill me too."

"Will they not kill you for preventing me from going out so that they may have a chance of killing me?"

"No, they do not want to kill you. They only want to keep you from going out."

This was puzzling information for Sanford.

Why should they desire to keep him there?

"Why do they wish to keep me in here?" he asked.

"That I cannot tell," she rejoined.

"Do you mean that you do not know?"

"Yes, I mean that I do not know. I only know that they do not wish you to leave here, but why, I do not know."

"And yet you promise to help me to escape if I will wait?"

"Yes."

"Why should you do that?"

"I do not wish to see you get into trouble, and I know that you will if you are not got out of here."

"What kind of trouble?"

"I cannot tell, but everybody who comes in here gets into trouble before they get away."

"Do you mean that they are killed?"

"Sometimes."

"But oftener merely robbed, I suppose?"

"Yes, if they have anything."

Sanford instinctively felt for his watch and pocketbook, and to his surprise, found that they had not been taken.

The old woman noticed the action, and smiled.

"They haven't robbed you, and I don't think they intend to," she observed.

"What motive can they have for keeping me here, then?"

"As I said, I do not know," she replied in an earnest tone.

Then for the first time Sanford began to see, or think he saw, through the whole plot.

These fellows were undoubtedly responsible for the murder of his brother and the robbery of the gold intended for Florence Disdale, and the object in detaining him there was to prevent him from making trouble with them until they had completed their work.

When he had worked the matter out thus far in his own mind he asked of the old woman:

"How long do you imagine they want to keep me here?"

"I cannot tell. It may be a day or two, or it may be a week or more. It depends upon how soon they get ready to—"

Here she hesitated, having apparently already gone further than she had intended.

"Get ready to what?" he demanded sternly.

"To—to—let you out," she faltered.

He was about to rail at her for not telling him the truth, but he remembered that she had promised to let him out if he would wait, and concluded to let the matter pass.

He turned it off by simply asking:

"How long shall I have to wait before you will be able to get me out of here?"

"Not very long now," she replied. "It will soon be daylight and they will leave here before then."

"Are they not afraid to trust me to your care?"

"Oh, no. They do not believe it possible for you to get out when the door is locked."

"Will they not blame you for allowing me to go?"

"They won't know that it was my fault. Besides they will not know anything about it."

"How is that?"

"Having kept you for the night they will not bother their heads any more about you, believing that I will keep you here until they tell me to let you go."

Another ray of light broke in upon him at this moment.

"See here," he said, "this fortune-telling is all a sham, of course, isn't it?"

The old woman started in surprise.

"What makes you think so?" she asked, in a quavering voice.

"Well, I believe it is. These fellows are the murderers of my brother, if he has been murdered, which I doubt, and the robbers also. You knew how to tell me what you did by being told all this by these men, and the whole business was a plot to detain me until they got through with the job."

The old woman hung her head and did not reply.

"Come, tell if this is not the truth," he went on.

Still she made no reply.

"I am convinced by your silence that I have guessed the truth," he continued, "and you may as well tell me the straight of it, rather than have me report the matter to the police, who will compel you to reveal the facts."

She slowly raised her head.

"You want to get out of here safe and sound, don't you?" she said.

"Yes."

"Well, I have promised to let you out, but that is in consideration of your asking no more such questions or making any such threats. You may do as you please when you get away from here, but if you want me to do what I promised, you had better not talk in this way."

Sanford saw that she had the best of it, and concluded that the best thing he could do was to follow her advice, so he said:

"Very well, have it your way. We will say no more about it."

Nevertheless, he was half inclined to compel her to open the door and take his chances on there being anybody in the hall to oppose his progress, but after weighing the matter in his mind for some time, he decided to bide his time rather than risk running amuck of one of these outlaws.

Seating himself in the chair where he had sat before, he gave himself up to reflection and to planning his course when he should make his escape.

An hour went by in this manner, and seemed to him a week, and the gray streaks of morning began to break in through the solitary window.

All this time the old woman had stood there, scarcely taking her eyes off him for a single instant.

At length, however, she opened the door and peeped out into the hall.

She had no more than done so when the Californian jumped to his feet and approached her.

Hearing his footsteps, she closed the door and turned to look at him.

He paused, and then asked:

"Is it not about time?"

She regarded him a moment as if undecided how to answer, and then replied:

"Yes, you may go now."

She threw open the door, and as he was about to pass out she said:

"You will warn the police, of course?"

"Certainly."

"And have me arrested with the others, I suppose?"

He looked at her and there was an expression of supplication and appealing to his pity in her withered face that touched him.

He hesitated, and then said:

"No, whatever I may report to the police, old lady, they shall never know anything about you from me."

Her wrinkled old face lighted up.

"Do you promise that?"

"I do," he replied firmly.

"Then go, and God bless you! I knew you were a gentleman, and am not sorry that I helped you to escape."

The good-natured Westerner was overcome with his feelings, and grasping the old woman's bony hand, he pressed it warmly as he said, the tears standing in his eyes:

"God bless you! And I shall not forget this kindness. If you ever want a friend, let me know. My name is Laurence Sanford, and I am stopping at the Coleman House. Good-by."

And, giving the hand a final pressure, he hurried along the still shadowy hall and down the gloomy stairs, forgetting any dangers which might be lurking in wait for him along that dark passage, in his anxiety to get away from the dreadful place.

He was a little disconcerted, however, when about half-way down the stairs to hear a burst of derisive laughter at the top of the same.

There were the voices of two persons, one of which he recognized as that of the old woman, and the other was that of a man.

Then he felt a trifle cheap, for he knew they were laughing at him, and concluded at once that the story about the men lying in wait for him in the hall was all a hoax, and had been told him by the old woman to prevent him from going away any sooner.

He did not wait to inquire into the truth of his suspicions, however, and lost no time in getting outside of the old house.

Once on the street, he engaged the first vehicle that offered and had himself driven forthwith to his hotel.

It was long after daylight when he reached the hotel, and he at once made inquiries about his late acquaintance.

Nobody knew anything about the fellow. No such a name as Will Withers was to be found on the register, but the clerk remembered seeing the young man in Sanford's company on the previous evening. He had never seen him before, though, nor had the fellow been seen since he left the hotel with Sanford.

The Californian was fully convinced now that he had been taken in by the slick young man, and began to suspect that the whole matter had been concocted, from the meeting of him at the depot to the detaining of him in the room at the old house, in advance, and for the purpose of keeping him out of their way while they carried into execution their diabolical plot.

Sanford went to his room and pondered over the matter till breakfast time, never, in the mean time, divulging to a soul what had passed since he had left the hotel the previous evening, nor did he intend divulging it to anybody, being too heartily ashamed of having allowed himself to be gulled in such a manner.

After breakfast he went to the Police Headquarters and laid the case of his missing

brother before the department, but even there he was careful to avoid any allusion to the experience of the night before.

When he had laid the case before the sergeant, the latter looked up the records and then said:

"Why, this is the case that we are already working on. The best detective we have in the service is working on the case, and if there is any such thing as unearthing the mystery he will do it."

"Who is this detective?" asked Sanford.

"We are not in the habit of revealing these matters, but as you are deeply interested in the case I will tell you. His name is Thaddeus Burr, and he lives at 438 West Thirty-fourth street."

"Thank you. I shall call upon him at once, as I wish to have a talk with him."

So saying, he left the Headquarters and started for Thad's house in Thirty-fourth street.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

BURR and his fair rescuer hurried from the house and succeeded in reaching the street without interference.

Once in the open air the detective's strength returned to him in a measure, but he did not feel equal to walking far.

So a hack was called and the two got in.

It was not till then that he discovered that the woman was about as weak as himself.

Her heroism alone had borne her up at this time.

The thought of liberty and of liberating him who had rescued her from a horrible death had served as a stimulant.

Day was just breaking when they emerged from the house, and the acute woman had chosen this as the fittest time to carry out her design.

"Now tell me," he began, "how you managed to escape from your captors, and how you knew where to find me."

She looked at him and smiled sadly.

"Perhaps I had better tell you first how I came to be recaptured by these wretches?" she observed.

"Yes, tell me that first."

She was silent a few moments and drew a deep sigh.

"Well," she began, "after the doctor gave me the medicine I felt so much better in the afternoon that I came down into the parlor and sat up awhile. Late in the afternoon a man called at the house and told your wife that he had come from you, and that you wanted me to come to you at the court to testify against those fellows."

"I had no suspicion that there was anything wrong and went to the door to speak to the man. He appeared to be a policeman, having on an officer's uniform, and as I had never seen him before, I thought it was all right. He had a carriage waiting for me, and, after getting my wraps, I followed him to the carriage, got in and we drove away."

"I had no idea where we were going, being a stranger in the city, and the first thing I knew we were here at my sister's house."

"Did you meet your sister?" interjected the detective.

"No, sir. You see it was dark by the time we reached the house, and I was taken right up-stairs to the room I had occupied before. As soon as I was left alone I decided to go down and see my sister and ask her to explain about my being carried off to the country and all that, but what was my horror to find myself locked in the room."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course you knew then that there was something wrong?"

"I knew that as soon as I found that they had brought me back there."

"What did you do when you found you were locked in?"

"I pounded on the door and screamed, but it was no use."

"Did no one come to you?"

"Not then."

"But later?"

"Later a servant came up and asked me what I wanted to eat, and I told her that I wanted nothing. You see I was determined

to eat nothing or drink nothing in the house, and I would then be sure that they were not poisoning me."

"How did you expect to live?"

"I did not think of that. Anyway, I had rather starve than have them poison me."

"So would I."

"Bettie—that's the servant—was about to lock the door again, when a sudden thought came to me. She had often admired and, I have no doubt coveted, a pair of ear-rings of mine, and as she was about to close the door I called her inside. She looked rather suspiciously at me, for she had no doubt had her orders, but when she saw me take up my jewel case and take out my ear-rings, her face was one vast smile. Her eyes twinkled as I had never seen them before as I held the trinkets up."

"Would you like to have these, Betty?"

I said. She smiled more than ever then. "Yes'm," she replied, "but you wouldn't give them to the likes of me?" "Why not?" I said. "They're too expensive," rejoined the girl. "Not very," I added. "Only two hundred dollars." "Whew!" she cried. "The likes of me with two hundred dollar ear-rings? I guess not!" "You are mistaken, Bettie," I said. "I am going to give them to you."

"I thought the poor girl would jump out of her skin. She danced, jumped, clapped her hands and fairly cried for joy. 'But,' I added, 'you are not to have them for nothing, remember. You have got to do something for them.' She was as sober as a judge in an instant. 'What am I to do?' she asked, timidly. 'Just leave that key with me when you go out, that is all.'"

"The poor creature was in a quandary."

"She did not know what to do."

"She stood looking alternately at me and the earrings, and at length said:

"But if the missus finds it out?" "She won't find it out," I replied. "She will know that you escaped, if you do, and lay it all on me."

"But you do not know that I intend to escape," I said. "But if I should take it into my head to do such a thing, I'll lock the door when I come out and leave the key in your room. I will also leave the window up so that they will think I escaped that way. Is it a bargain?"

"She gave another longing look at the jewels and I saw that her firmness was forsaking her."

"Finally she said:

"If you really think it can be arranged so that missus won't suspect me—' And hesitated. 'There is not the least danger,' I told her. 'Besides, if the police come here and find me you will be arrested with the others.'"

"Is there danger of the missus and the others being arrested?" she asked, with a frightened face. "There is," I replied. "These people are keeping me here for the purpose of killing me, and the police already have a suspicion of it. If they find out a little more they will come here and arrest everybody and you will all be hanged."

"Didn't that fetch her?" laughed the detective.

"It did, indeed. She gave me the key, and did not even want to take the ear-rings, but I insisted upon it."

"Did she understand why you were detained there?"

"No, sir, I am positive she did not. She was under the impression that there was something about my malady that made it necessary for me to be kept in confinement."

"But you haven't told me how you ascertained that I was here," interposed Burr.

"I am coming to that. When Bettie was about to leave me, and the door was still standing open, I heard a terrific crash down-stairs, and asked Bettie to go down and find out what it was."

"She went down, and in a little while returned with the information that there was a crazy man whom they had had confined in a closet, and that he had just broken out."

"I did not believe the story, and something told me that it was you whom they had confined, and in spite of Bettie's protestations, I crept to the top of the stairs where I could see and hear without danger of being discovered, and there I saw the whole scene, or a good part of it, between you and them,

and heard enough to satisfy me that my suspicions had been correct."

"And you determined to rescue me?"

"Yes, if it cost me my life."

"Brave girl! But how did you go about it?"

"I waited till everybody was in bed—till nearly morning, in fact, and then I stole out of my room."

"Where did you get the acid?"

"I was just going to tell you that. I knew in reason that they would have you in irons and that they could not be taken off without a key or some other extra means, and I was in a dilemma for some time. Then I thought of nitric acid. I knew that would cut iron or steel, and I recalled that my brother-in-law kept some in the basement. So down I went to the basement and procured the bottle. It is a wonder some of the servants did not awaken and give the alarm, but they did not, and I got to your prison safely."

"The next thing was to remove the board they had nailed across the door, and that without making a noise."

"This necessitated another trip to the basement to get a crowbar. I soon procured this and came back."

"It did not take me long to pry off the board, and now you know the rest."

"Yes, and a noble, brave little girl you are," cried the detective, rapturously. "I do not know how I shall ever repay you for this kindness and self-sacrifice."

"Don't speak of self-sacrifice, Mr. Burr, I beg," cried the girl. "You seem to forget that I owe my life to you, and that there was a great deal more risk in your case than in mine."

"And you appear to forget that I was merely doing my duty as a detective."

"That may be, but there are very few detectives who would have gone out of their way as you did."

"Perhaps you are right, but every detective worthy of the name would have done it."

By this time they had reached Burr's house, and the couple were only too glad to get back where they were assured rest and comfort.

Mrs. Burr soon had a bounteous meal prepared, and the two wanderers did ample justice to it.

The good lady was also glad to welcome the girl back after her abduction by the rascals.

"I felt a misgiving after you were gone, Florence," she said. "I feared that all was not right, and then when neither of you came back I was sure that I had made a great mistake in allowing you to go with that man. Still, I was not very uneasy, as I knew Thad would rescue you in time, as he had done before."

"But, my dear," interposed the detective, "it was Florence who did the rescuing this time."

"What?" cried the wife, in astonishment.

"I say that it was Florence who rescued me, instead of I rescuing her."

"How was that?"

Burr related the strange and thrilling adventure from the beginning, and did not hesitate to elaborate on Florence's bravery and heroism whenever opportunity offered.

The girl blushed and became greatly confused.

"You give me a great deal too much credit," she averred. "It was a simple thing, after all."

"Not very simple, I should say," observed the detective's wife. "It is more than I would have dared to have done, even to rescue my own husband."

"I do not believe that, my dear," declared her husband. "I guess you could play the heroine as well as the next one if occasion offered."

At that moment a servant entered and announced that there was a gentleman at the door who wished to see the detective.

"Show him into the sitting-room," said Burr.

As he said this he chanced to glance at Florence, and saw that her face was pale and full of apprehension.

"If it is one of our enemies," she admonished, "be careful that he does not get the advantage of you."

"There is no danger of that," smiled Burr.

"If it were one of those fellows he would not be likely to come here alone. There is no danger of any of that gang venturing out without being well backed by his pals."

A few moments later the detective joined his caller in the little parlor.

He found him to be a tall, fine-looking man of about thirty, well-dressed, and bearing other evidences of prosperity.

His name was Laurence Sanford, and as soon as he had introduced himself, he began:

"Mr. Burr, I will come to the point at once. I had a brother who I have no doubt has been murdered in this city, and as you have been highly recommended to me, I should like to engage you upon the case."

Why was it that Burr's mind reverted to the Burling Slip affair at once?

CHAPTER XIX.

A LITTLE LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT.

"LET us go into my private office," said the detective, as soon as the stranger had announced his business. "I transact all of my private business there."

With that he led the way into a small room off the end of the hall.

It was a queer sort of place, and strangers entering it for the first time generally spent several minutes in looking about at the droll, not to say startling arrangement of things.

The walls were lined with a miscellaneous collection of trophies gathered from all parts of the world, and for the most part belonging in a general way to the profession of the detective.

There were, for instance, nearly every kind of weapon known to civilized man; burglars' tools of every description, handcuffs of every conceivable pattern, various implements of torture used for the punishment of criminals in various parts of the world, and a thousand and one other similar curiosities, and interspersed at intervals about the walls with a grinning skull or complete skeleton.

Burr's visitor stared at him with wide-eyed wonder as he took his seat, and then turned his eyes upon the detective as if to compare his face with his surroundings and ascertain whether the one corresponded with the other.

And he appeared as much surprised at the latter as he did at the former.

He seemed unable to reconcile the frank, good-natured face with its somewhat gruesome surroundings.

Burr noticed his surprise and laughed.

"What do you think of my museum?" he questioned.

"It is rather gloomy, I should say," observed the stranger. "I should hardly expect one of your apparent cheerful temperament to have a fancy for such things."

"Oh, we detectives have to deal with queer things, and what seems gruesome to the rest of the world are matter-of-fact and common-place to us. But let us get to business. You say that you have reason to believe that your brother was murdered in this city? What reason have you for thinking so?"

"Well, in the first place, he came here with a good deal of money, and we have heard nothing of him since or the money either; and in the second place, since arriving in the city I have learned that there was a man found murdered a few days ago, the description of whom tallies exactly with that of my brother."

"What was your brother's name?"

"George Sanford."

"Older or younger than yourself?"

"Two years younger."

"What was his description?"

The stranger went on to describe his brother, and as detail after detail came out, the detective could not help but see that they agreed precisely with the description of the man whom he had found in Burling Slip.

He said nothing of this to Sanford, however, and went on:

"You say your brother had a good deal of money with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"About how much?"

"In the neighborhood of half a million dollars."

"It is strange that he should have carried that amount with him, when he could so easily have purchased a draft on a New York bank and thus been secure."

"He had good reason for not doing so, I believe. In the first place, it was not convenient to purchase an exchange draft where he was—in the interior of California—and in the second place, he did not wish to be put to the trouble of identification when he reached here. Besides, the money was for another person, and he desired to be able to turn it over to her in gold coin which he had received it in."

Burr opened his eyes.

He imagined he saw the fag end of a clue in all this.

"You will pardon my apparent inquisitiveness, Mr. Sanford," he said, "but you know we have to know all about a subject before we can proceed with it with any degree of assurance."

"Certainly, sir. I understand that perfectly. What did you wish to ask?"

"For whom was this money intended?"

The stranger hesitated and glanced about him as if afraid of being overheard in what he was about to say.

"We are entirely alone, are we not?" he hesitated.

"Yes. This is the *sanctum sanctorum*, and nothing uttered here goes any further. It is like a masonic lodge; all secrets are sacred here."

"The young lady's name is Florence Disdale," pursued the stranger, after another pause.

"Florence Disdale!"

Thad Burr started involuntarily at mention of the name.

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"I have met her."

"You have been in California, then?"

"No, sir. I met her in New York."

"Then you know where she is?"

"I do."

"That is fortunate, for I have been here two days, and have been unable to get any trace of her, although I have sought in every direction and tried every source of information."

"Her friends in California do not know her whereabouts, then?" said the detective.

"They know that she is in New York, but that is all."

"I can readily understand this. But how came your brother in possession of her money?"

"It was like this. The girl's adopted mother died a little over six months ago, leaving her all her fortune, amounting to nearly two millions of dollars, and my brother was appointed trustee of the estate, about three-fourths of the estate being in real estate and houses and one-fourth in money. The money—all gold coin—had been kept by the old woman, who was something of a miser, in a safe in her own house, she being, like many people of that kind, suspicious of banks."

"Well, before the old woman died she informed certain people that the money was in the iron safe at the head of her bed, and it was taken in charge by a committee appointed by the court for that purpose. My brother, as I say, was appointed trustee and guardian of the girl, and as soon as the will was probated the money was turned over to him, and he brought it on here with the intention of giving it to the girl."

"And you do not know but he may have given it to her?"

"No, and I do not know that he did. My impression is that he never had the opportunity."

"You think he was robbed, then?"

"That is my opinion."

"Of course he did not have the money on his person, so they must have secured the box or whatever contained the gold, and then murdered him to prevent him from making a stir about it."

"That is my theory."

"Well," said the detective, "we can soon find out whether the girl received the money or not."

"Yes, that is the first thing to find out. You know where she lives, of course?"

"Yes."

"Then we had better go there at once."

"It will not be necessary. I will bring her here."

"Very well. That will be just as well."

"Do you know Miss Florence?" questioned Burr, rising.

"Very well. I have known her since she was a little girl."

"Excuse me a moment, and I will fetch her."

"What, she isn't in this house?"

"She is."

The stranger was greatly astonished, but Burr did not wait to explain any further and left him to ponder over the coincidence of running upon the object of his search in the very place he had least expected to find her.

When the detective entered the dining-room where Florence and Mrs. Burr still sat talking, the girl looked up inquiringly into his face, and quickly asked:

"Was it one of our enemies, sir?"

"No; one of our friends," he replied smiling, "and he wants to see you."

Florence turned pale and glanced apprehensively at the detective's wife.

The latter smiled and nodded approvingly. "You may be sure it's all right, my dear," she said, "or Thaddeus would not ask you to see the man."

The girl rose and followed him, but still she was a little nervous.

The terrible experience through which she had passed had taught her to suspect even her friends.

A moment later she was ushered into the presence of the Californian.

A mutual recognition quickly followed, and Florence flew at her old friend in a transport of joy, while he, too much overcome with his emotions to speak, silently folded the girl in his arms and wept for joy.

"Oh, Uncle Larry!" she cried. "I am so glad to see you! When did you come, and where is Uncle George?"

It was some moments before he could subdue his emotions enough to answer the last question.

But after a severe trial he managed to falter, his words interspersed with sobs:

"I'm greatly afraid, Florry, that your Uncle George is dead."

"Dead! Uncle George?"

And she released herself and drew away from him with a look of horror.

"I'm afraid so, Florry," he replied.

"Don't you know?"

"No, Florry, not for certain. The fact is—"

"How's that?" she interrupted eagerly.

"Why, you see your Uncle George came on here a week ago or so, with your money, and he hasn't been heard from since. And now I learn that there was a man found dead who answers the description of him."

Florence wrung her hands, while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"This is awful!" she cried bitterly. "But maybe it ain't so. Maybe it's a mistake, that the man found was somebody that looked like Uncle George."

"I'm afraid not, Florry," rejoined the other mournfully. "Everything tallies with him. And then the motive for the murder—"

"Murder!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me that he was murdered, Uncle Larry?"

"I'm afraid he was, Florry," murmured the Californian.

"What could they have killed Uncle George for?"

"That's a point I was wanting to come at, Florry. The detective here and I were just talking about it."

He paused, and the girl asked eagerly:

"What is it, Uncle Larry?"

"Did you see George when he came to the city?"

"No! I didn't know he had been here," cried the girl in great astonishment.

"I thought as much, and that settles the point we were trying to come at. Your Uncle George was murdered for his—or rather your—money, Florry."

"What do you mean?"

"He came on here to fetch you your money—the gold your mamma left you, and as you never saw him and didn't get the money, I've no doubt he was robbed and murdered."

Florence was too much overwhelmed to

speak for several minutes, and then she suddenly burst out in a wild wail:

"Merciful Heaven! This is too awful for anything! Uncle George murdered and robbed, and that too by my own brother!"

"What!" gasped Sanford. "Your brother? Not Harry?"

But the girl had sunken into a chair in a state of insensibility, but the detective answered the question for her.

"Yes," he said, "Harry Disdale is at the bottom of it all."

CHAPTER XX.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

SANFORD was so astonished by these revelations that he was stricken dumb for several minutes, and sat pondering over the matter.

Meanwhile Burr had called assistance and had Florence removed from the room and restored to consciousness.

When he had again returned to the private office Sanford said:

"This is a worse affair than I at first imagined. It appears to be a family affair, which makes it all the worse."

"Yes, it is a pretty bad case," rejoined the detective. "Were you acquainted with Florence's brother Harry?"

"I knew him when a boy, but I haven't seen him for several years past."

"Do you know anything about his character?"

"No, except from what I have heard."

"Would you suppose, judging from what you have heard about him, that he was capable of committing these crimes?"

"No, sir, I should not. From what I have heard about the young man, I supposed he was a steady, upright person. By the way—"

Sanford paused, colored and became a trifle nervous.

"What is it?" inquired Burr curiously.

"I was going to say—but I had resolved to say nothing about the affair. Still, I don't know as there is any use of keeping it a secret from you."

Again he paused, and Thad asked:

"What affair is that, sir?"

Sanford smiled and turned red again.

"I met with a little adventure last night, but as I said I had resolved to keep it to myself, for the reason that it does not reflect much credit on my intellect."

Thad was mystified and more than ever anxious to know what the nature of the adventure was.

"That depends," he said. "If it was the matter of being taken in and done for by New York crooks there is no discredit to you. Some of the brightest and most worldly-wise people in the country or the world, for that matter, are taken in by these fellows."

Sanford opened his eyes.

He began to think the detective possessed some of the alleged powers of divination of the old fortune-teller to have guessed the situation so closely.

"You have hit it, sir," he said, laughing.

"That is exactly what happened to me."

"How did it happen?"

"I'll tell you," returned the Californian, after a pause.

He then went on to relate the adventure from the time of the meeting with the young man on the ferry-dock to that of his release from the room in the old house.

"What was this young man like?" asked the detective at the conclusion of the other's story.

Sanford described the young man calling himself Will Withers, and Burr recognized him at once as Harry Disdale.

"That is our young man," he observed.

"Disdale?"

"Yes."

"Is it possible?"

"There is no doubt about it."

"Come to think of it," remarked Sanford, after a moment's reflection, "and to recall his face, I see that there is a strong resemblance between him and Florence."

"There is no doubt about it being the same," affirmed Burr. "But you say this was in a quaint old house?"

"Yes, a very quaint old place."

"Looks as though it might be haunted?"

"Yes, the very place, of all others, where you would expect to run across a ghost."

"Do you remember how you went to get there?"

"No, I couldn't tell that, because we went in a cab and I didn't notice which way we went, but I remember how I went to get back to my hotel."

He then described the route with such accuracy of detail that Thad had no difficulty in recognizing it, and said:

"I know the place, and this proves, more than ever, that you were in the hands of our gentry. That is, perhaps, the reason they did not murder you."

"I don't see why they should have spared me after murdering my brother," objected Sanford.

"They probably had some reason, or they would have killed or robbed you, or both. Probably they had had surfeit in the killing of your brother."

"Probably."

"Have you been to the Morgue yet, to see whether the man found murdered was your brother or not?"

"No."

"Then you had better go at once. I will go with you."

"Thank you. I shall go at once, and shall be glad of your company."

A few minutes later they left the house, and, taking a cab, were driven to the City Morgue.

It was a horrible place to enter, especially for one who had never been there before.

A glass partition shut the beholder off from a long room along one side of which, nearest the partition, extended a row of marble slabs.

Just over the slabs burned a gas-jet which flickered faintly in the foul air, and on the slabs in many cases, lay a ghastly corpse with hideous upturned face.

A stream of water fell with a dull monotonous patter on the faces, rendering the sight more dreadful than it otherwise would have been.

Sanford wore a horrified expression as he passed along the partition gazing through at the various unidentified bodies.

The detective was at his side, but neither of them spoke for a long time.

Thad, having seen the face of the murdered man the night of the tragedy, also scrutinized each face as he passed along, hoping to recognize the one they were after.

The Californian, who was in advance, at length stopped before one of the slabs and was studying the features of the corpse thereon with intense interest.

He appeared unable to decide whether it was the remains of his brother or not, as the features were somewhat blackened and distorted, when the detective came up to him.

He also scrutinized it for some moments, but he was not so long in determining.

"If I am not greatly mistaken," he observed, "that is the body which I found in Burling Slip."

Sanford shrugged his shoulders without removing his eyes from the ghastly face.

"In that case," he returned, "I am pretty well satisfied that it was not my brother you found."

"We shall soon see whether it is the body I discovered or not," pursued Thad.

And, seeking the man in charge of the place, he asked to be given whatever facts were known in connection with the unknown.

The man, in the most practical manner possible, stepped over and took the number attached to the body, and then returning to his office, took down a large register and opening it, ran his finger down the page till he came to the number corresponding with that on the corpse.

"Unknown," he muttered. "Found, apparently murdered, in Burling Slip, October 18th. No marks by which to identify."

"That is the man," observed the detective.

Sanford walked back and took another long look at the face, and shook his head.

"I am satisfied that it is not my brother," he finally said. "There is a strong resemblance, but it is not he."

"Might you not be mistaken?"

"I might, that is true, but I don't believe it. The hair is not the same color as George's, and the beard is too thick on the side of the

face. My brother's beard never grew on the sides of his face to amount to anything."

"You are sure enough to allow the body to remain here, are you?" questioned Thad.

"I am," replied the other firmly.

Thad was unable to understand the sudden change in the man's demeanor.

He had suddenly become hard and cold, even to indifference, and when he had concluded the last sentence he turned toward the door with the request:

"Let's go."

"Won't you look any further?" asked Thad, astonished more than ever.

"No. I have seen them all, and know that my brother is not there. What is the use of looking any further?"

"Suit yourself," said Thad dryly.

And the two men walked along side by side for some distance without speaking.

At length the Californian broke the silence by saying:

"This is indeed a serious business, and I believe I can say with more propriety than ever that it is a family affair."

"What do you mean?" demanded Thad, curiously.

He did not answer at once, but taking a letter from his pocket, glanced it over and then handed it to the detective.

The letter ran as follows:

"MY DEAR LAURENCE—"

"When you get this note I shall probably be dead, as the doctor says I cannot live many days. I have made a will leaving everything to Florence, and mentioned George as my administrator and her guardian. I have been trying to persuade him to turn the gold into bonds or securities, as it is dangerous to carry that amount of gold, to say nothing of the temptation. Use your influence with him, Larry, and try to get him to do as I request. Think of the danger and, above all, the temptation."

There was a good deal more of the letter, but the rest of it concerned family matters and would not interest the reader. The letter was signed "Sarah J. Crandell."

This was the name which Florence had mentioned as that of her adopted mother and legator.

The detective was puzzled.

He imagined he saw a glimmer of light, but was not quite certain whether he understood Sanford's drift or not.

While he was still reflecting on the matter, the Californian, who had never for an instant removed his eyes from the detective's face, asked:

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know what to think," replied Thad.

"Do you see no connection between it and this affair?" inquired the other.

"To tell you the truth, I cannot, unless—perhaps—you mean to say that your brother—"

"That is the point exactly," interrupted the other. "The word temptation solves the problem. My brother has never been murdered at all."

"You believe, then, that he is in league with these others for the purpose of robbing poor Florence, and that the story of his murder was a sham manufactured for the purpose of throwing us off the track. Is that your theory?"

"That is it."

"It may be the correct one, but I cannot see how they have managed it so well. Besides, I don't understand how your brother and Florence's brother could have been so depraved as to have entered into so heartless a scheme. Was your brother that sort of man?"

"On the contrary, he has always been known for his honesty and uprightness above everything else. But there is that word temptation. He could not resist that."

"If he has always borne a good reputation, as you say, I can hardly believe that even temptation would have led him this far, although he might have been tempted to appropriate some of her money to his own use; but how can you reconcile his previous good character with this infamous crime, which involves the attempted murder of the girl?"

"I cannot explain it, sir. I don't pretend

to, and I may be mistaken in my theory, but somehow I cannot get it out of my head."

"I am almost sure that you are mistaken. However, you may have the right of it, and we shall soon find out whether you have or not. Will you come back to the house with me?"

"Yes, I should like to see how Florence is getting along. Not a word to her, though, about my theory. It would kill her to discover that her uncle in addition to her brother was mixed up in the affair."

"No, we shall say nothing of it to her."

When they got back to Burr's house they found Florence, who had recovered entirely from her late prostration, anxiously awaiting their return.

"Did you find him?" was her first question.

"No, Florry, he wasn't there," rejoined Sanford.

Her countenance fell.

"Then, I suppose they've buried him in the Potter's Field," she said.

"No, I don't believe they have," rejoined the Californian absently. "It would be better, maybe if—"

"What?"

He came to himself with a shudder, grew very red and confused.

"I was about to say it would probably have been better—if we—had—had gone sooner, Florry," he finally made out to stammer.

She looked at him curiously, and appeared unable to understand why he should have been so confused over a matter of that kind.

"Maybe, though," she interposed with a sudden inspiration, "maybe he hasn't been killed at all, Uncle Larry."

"That is what—that is—probably you are right, Florry," he faltered again.

And the girl was even more surprised at his hesitation, but attributed it to his grief for his brother.

"I've been thinking, though, Uncle Larry, since you went away, that—that—but I know I shouldn't have let such a thing enter my foolish head—"

"What was that, Florry?" he interrupted quickly, turning a trifle pale.

"It's nothing, and you'll think me foolish if I tell you."

"Never mind, dear, tell me. I'm anxious to know."

"Why, once just before mother died she said she hoped that all that gold wouldn't be a temptation to Uncle George. But of course she was old and childish and not responsible for what she said or thought. But I was thinking after you went this morning that how terrible it would be if—if uncle had—had—"

"What, Florry?" and the Californian had turned as white as a ghost, and was trembling like an aspen leaf.

"If he had been overcome by the temptation that mamma spoke of, but I know that that could not be true, don't you, Uncle Larry?"

"Of course, of course," he replied, forcing a laugh. "He could never have been so weak as that, deary."

At the same time Thad could see that the man was in a terrible state of mind over the discovery that his niece had formulated the same theory as himself, and even he (the detective) began to think that perhaps there was something in it.

CHAPTER XXI.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS.

There appeared little more for the detective to do now in the way of securing evidence against the gang who had murdered Florence Disdale's guardian and tried to murder her.

The only thing to do now was to capture his men.

Of course it would be important to also find out what they had done with the money, but that would doubtless come out in the course of his investigations and search after the criminals.

Sanford took leave of the detective, promising to call again in the afternoon, and Burr, having had no sleep for two nights, resigned himself to slumber for several hours, and Florence followed his example.

In the afternoon after procuring warrants

for the four men, the detective prepared himself for the expedition by disguising himself as an old woman.

Sanford who was to accompany him, was on hand early, and Burr altered the appearance of his face so that his best friends would not have known him.

Thus accoutered, they set out a little after six o'clock.

Their first call was at the house in Forty-third street.

Bettie, the maid to whom Florence had given the ear-rings, met them at the door, and informed them that everybody was away from home.

"Are you sure of this?" demanded the alleged old woman.

"Yes, mam," replied the maid.

"Because," pursued the detective, "Mrs. Carter told me she would be sure to be here at this time of day, and she wanted me to come and take her measure for a dress."

"Well, she isn't here," affirmed the girl.

"I don't believe it," flouted the old dress-maker. "She said you'd probably say she wasn't in, and she wasn't to everybody, and that I must insist on seeing her."

With that the detective, who had the appearance of a most gigantic female, pushed the girl aside, and he and his companion strode in.

Bettie was in a terrible flurry and tried her best to prevent them from going in, but it was no use.

But when they were once within, she became passive and allowed them to go where they pleased without molestation.

Burr went directly to Mrs. Carter's room, but found it empty.

He next visited the parlor and drawing-room, and found them in the same condition.

From that every room in the house was successively visited, but with the same result.

He returned to the lower hall, where Bettie had remained, and was surprised to find a couple of policemen awaiting his return.

The cunning girl had gone out and got the officers during the detective's absence, and they were waiting to arrest him and his companion, on the supposition that they were burglars.

"Phwat are yez doin' here?" demanded one of the cops.

"Looking for game," replied Burr.

"Phwat kind of game?" questioned the astonished policeman.

"Wild game," rejoined the detective.

"Wal, kim along wid me, an' Oi'll show yez all the game yez want."

"Where?"

"At the police station, mum."

"I prefer not to go there," smiled the detective, handing the cop his card.

The latter was too much astonished to speak for a minute or two, and when he did recover the power of speech, he uttered little more than a grunt, and then turning upon his heel, strode out of the house, accompanied by his astonished comrade.

"Well, Bettie, I guess you told the truth this time," observed the detective, as soon as the policemen were gone. "But why did you want me arrested?"

"Because I thought you was burglars," she whimpered.

"But you saw that the police refused to arrest us, didn't you?" he laughed.

She made no reply.

She was too much surprised at the whole proceeding to utter a word.

Burr and his companion then left the house and, taking a hack, had themselves driven to the old house in Greenwich Village.

The curious old place was closed up as tightly as ever and there was no sign of life about it.

Nevertheless, the detective knocked vigorously at the door.

There was no response, and he repeated his summons.

But to no purpose.

He knocked repeatedly, but there was no one came to the door.

He was about to turn away with the view to going to the rear and effecting a forcible entrance, when some one outside the little court called to him.

"Yer won't find nobuddy dere, missus," said the voice.

Burr looked in the direction, and was a

little surprised to see his old acquaintance, Mickey Mallon.

The detective affected not to know him, and of course he did not recognize the detective, and asked:

"Where is everybody?"

"They don't nobuddy live there," was the dogged response.

"Oh, now, my good fellow, I happen to know better! Where is the old man—Ainsworth, and the hunchback? You needn't try to fool me in that way."

"Dey ust to live dere, but dey don't no more."

"Where do they live?"

"I dunno. Dey've lef' de city. See?"

"When did they leave?"

"Las' night. See?"

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure."

"Did Disdale go with them?"

"I dunno him."

"The man they call Harry."

"Oh, him? Yep, he went too."

Burr walked out toward the fence near which Mickey was standing, and when very near the fellow he whispered:

"Are you quite sure that you could not find out where these people have gone, Mickey?"

As he finished the sentence the detective slipped a dollar into the vagabond's hand.

Mickey opened his hand and stared at the coin with a broad grin for a full minute, and looked up at the old woman, as he supposed him to be, with a hungry grin.

"You see if you do," pursued Thad, "it might be worth several of those to you."

The ruffian still grinned.

"How many?" he mumbled in a gleeful tone.

"Oh, fifty—perhaps more."

Mickey was silent.

He appeared to be communing with himself.

The offer was evidently too tempting to be refused without due consideration, and he was probably considering whether he would ever obtain a similar sum from his masters, the gang.

Meantime he had been glancing backward and forward from the coin to the detective's face.

At length he looked up with a twinkle in his eye.

"W'at d'ye wanter know fer, old lady?" he questioned.

Burr saw that he was feeling his way and decided to lead him on as far as possible.

"Why, you see," he answered in a confidential voice, "I'm a fortune-teller, and Disdale wanted me to tell him where a lot of gold which was taken from the man that was murdered in Burling Slip, is, and he was to give me five hundred dollars for telling him."

Mickey laughed.

"He told you dat?" he grinned.

"Yes."

"Say, old lady, dat covey give yer a mighty big stiff that time."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean dat he knowed w'ere de goold was all de time."

"Is that true?"

"Dat's straight."

"I wonder what he wanted to tell me that for, then?"

"Oh, I reckon he wanted to jolly ye a bit, dat's all."

"And he knew where it was all the time, eh?"

"Yep."

"Where was it?"

Mickey chuckled and jerked his thumb in the direction of the old house.

"I reckon if de old shed 'd 'a' burnt down two days ago," he said, "dem double-loons 'd 'a' all been took out in a lump."

"Why?"

"Dey'd 'a' melted an' run togedder like taffy in de sun. See?"

"Am I to understand that the gold was kept in the old house up to two days ago?"

"Yep, up ter las' night."

"Did you see them take it out?"

"Shure."

"You know where it was taken, then?"

"Not 'zactly."

"But you have an idea?"

"Yep."

"Where?"

Mickey hesitated, grinned, twisted his fingers together and finally asked:

"What's it wort' to yer to know?"

"Oh, a hundred, I guess."

"Spot?"

"As soon as I am convinced that you tell me the truth."

"Part spot, den?"

"Yes, five down."

"Make her ten, an' she goes."

Mickey was a shrewd business man.

"All right, ten it is," said Burr. "Where is it?"

"Did yer ever hear o' de Crewless Craft?" he grinned.

"I have heard something about it."

"De p'leece has er good deal ter say 'bout it, but dey can't make nothin' out on't."

"Well, is that where the gold is?"

"I dunno, fer certain, as I told yer, but dat's what I tink."

"Very well, Mickey," returned the detective, handing him the ten dollar bill, "I'll give you that for the tip, and if I find out that what you tell me is correct, you shall have the other ninety."

"Dat's all right, old lady," grinned Mickey, pocketing the money. "But yer didn't tell me w'at yer wanted ter know 'bout de goold for."

The detective was staggered for a moment, but he soon recovered his presence of mind.

"Why, you see," he said, winking knowingly, "the information might come in handy in case I wanted to tell Disdale's fortune, see?"

"Yep. Youse is slick, youse is. Dat's de way all youse forchin-tellers does business, I reckon."

"Pretty much. It is always safer to know where a thing is when you are going to tell about it."

There was something suggestive in the fellow's grin when he looked at Burr this time, and partly closed one eye.

"Say, old lady," he muttered, "how much is it wort' fer me not to give yer away?"

"Not a cent," replied the detective.

"I don't mean 'bout de forchin-tellin'."

"What do you mean?"

"Dat youse is a detective, see?"

"Oh, in that case it might be worth something, Mickey. Suppose I were a detective and should refuse to give you a cent not to give me away, what would you do?"

"Give yer away, o' course."

"To whom?"

"De gang."

"In that case I'll just take you along now," and before Mickey was aware of it, the darbies were snapped on his wrists.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNEXPECTED RELATIONSHIP.

Mickey had been shackled so quickly and unexpectedly that he was hardly aware of the fact even after it had been accomplished.

Then he looked at the detective with a hurt expression and growled:

"Isay, w'ot yer doin' dat for?"

"Oh, I just thought I might as well give you a place to sleep to-night, as you don't appear to have any home."

"Youse don't mean ter say dat youse is goin' ter lock me up?"

"That's about the size of it, Mickey."

"W'ot for?"

"Well, your admission proves to me that you are one of the gang, and as the others are to be locked up, you may as well go along now."

"Is de odders to be locked up too?"

"Yes."

"W'en?"

"Well, as soon as I catch them."

"Dat's w'ot I thought. But youse will never ketch dem blokeys. Dey're too fly, see?"

"Well, you are not too fly," laughed Thad, "and I'll just take you along for luck."

"Oh, I'm fly enuff, but I shoots me kisser too much, dat's de trouble wid me."

"You're right, Mickey. If you hadn't talked quite so much you wouldn't have got into trouble. But come on. We are losing time."

Burr was about to march his prisoner off,

when to his surprise, the door of the old house opened and an old woman came out.

The instant she caught sight of Mickey she ran to his side.

Thad did not know her from Adam, but Sanford recognized her as the pretended fortune-teller he had had to deal with the night before, but she was too much absorbed in the matter of Mickey's arrest to notice him.

She appeared unable to comprehend the meaning of the spectacle of the young man in irons and in the custody of an old woman.

"What does this mean, Terrence?" she demanded, addressing the young man.

"Selp me Moses, I dunno, mudder," replied Mickey innocently. "Dis jay wot's dressed up like er woman, but's er detective in disguise, wants ter run me in fer some-thing."

The allusion to what appeared to her as a woman as a man and a detective increased the old woman's astonishment, and she stared at Thad for a minute or two before speaking.

Finally, however she found words to say:

"What does this mean, sir—are you really a man?" she faltered, under the impression that she had made a mistake in addressing him as "Sir."

"I don't know that it concerns you, madam," replied Thad. "But to answer your first question, I will say that the young man is known to be in league with a band of desperadoes, and I have arrested him. That is all."

"Who says he is connected with a band of desperadoes?" she demanded in a screeching voice.

"I do," was the reply.

"Then you lie!" she screamed. "He is my son, and as good a boy as there is in the city."

"It is all right for you to think so, madam," replied Thad coolly, "but he has as good as admitted that he was connected with these outlaws. Besides I have caught him carrying messages for them."

"It's a lie! He's my own darling boy, and was never guilty of a wrong in his life."

Thad made no reply to this.

He saw that he would only be wasting time to discuss the matter with the old woman, and, grasping the boy's arm, hurried him along, with the command:

"Come on!"

"Ain't yer goin' ter listen to w'ot me mudder says?" growled Mickey sullenly.

"Not this time," rejoined the detective. "If she has anything to say in your behalf it will be time when you come to trial. Come on."

At that moment the old woman caught sight of Sanford, and in spite of his slight disguise, recognized him—probably by his clothing—and began to rail at him.

"Oh, you wretch!" she screeched. "You promised that you wouldn't report this thing to the police if I would let you out last night, and here you've gone and had my poor, innocent boy arrested! You ungrateful wretch!"

"You are mistaken," returned the Californian, very much embarrassed. "I promised to say nothing about you, and I have kept my word, and as for your own son there, I was not aware that such a person existed until five minutes ago, and then I did not know that he was your son."

"Why did you have him arrested?" she demanded.

"I had nothing to do with his arrest, madam," answered Sanford, edging away as fast as possible.

"Who did, then?" she screeched, following him up.

"No one. The detective there was trying to bribe him to tell where the gold which these robbers stole was, and it seems that the boy, after telling where it was, threatened to notify his pals that the detective was on their track, and the detective thought it prudent to prevent this by arresting the boy. That is all I know about it."

By this time Thad had procured a cab and entered it and called to Sanford to follow him, so the latter ran away from the old woman and joined his companion in the cab, where the prisoner had already been stowed.

Thad laughed as the vehicle rolled away.

"The old woman seems to take a good deal of interest in you," he observed.

"Yes, so she does," admitted Sanford.

"What was she saying to you?"

"She was accusing me of having her son arrested."

"How came she to think that?"

"Well, you see she has seen me before."

"Seen you before?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say that she is the fortune-teller you were telling me about?"

"She's the dame."

"Is she your mother, Mickey?" asked Burr.

"Yep, dat's w'ot dey say," responded the young man, with a grin.

"What has she got to do with these rascals?"

"She ain't got nuttin' to do wid dem, see?" he growled.

"What is she doing in that house where they hang out, then?"

"Oh, I s'pose she does some kinder chores fer dem," he explained. "Pore folks has ter make er livin', yer know."

"But she pretends to be a fortune-teller."

"I dunno nuttin' 'bout dat," he answered, sullenly.

"Did you ever know her to tell fortunes?"

"Oh, she's like de res' of us, she earns a hones' penny mos' any way she kin."

"Even by pretending to tell fortunes, when she knows that she can't tell anything, eh?"

"Dat's de way o' all de worl', I reckon. Fake's de word."

"I guess I'd better run her in too."

"W'ot fer?"

"For being implicated with the rest of the gang."

"W'ich she ain't."

"We'll see about that."

Mickey was silent for some time, and then said:

"I wisht yer wouldn't run der ole woman in."

"Why?"

"'Cause she's me mudder, 'nd ole, 'sides she's never had nuttin' ter do wid de gang."

"Well, I'll tell you how you can keep her out of prison, Mickey," said Thad.

"How?"

"Give me the names of all the gang."

"Dat I can't do," he replied with a troubled brow.

"Why not?"

"Fer de reason dat I don't know deir names."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Sure."

"How is that?"

"It's one o' de rules o' de gang dat deir right names is never knowed."

"Not even to one another?"

"Dat's right."

"How do they manage about addressing one another?"

"Dey has nick-names. None o' de gang don't know my name, 'cept Mickey. An' dey don't even know dat de ole woman's me mudder, see?"

Thad was puzzled.

For the most part he had been truthful, but in this case it might be that he had been pledged, on pain of death, that he would reveal the name of no man belonging to the gang.

"If I knew that you were telling me the truth, Mickey, I should refrain from arresting your mother, but I am afraid to trust you," he said.

"Yer needn't b'leeve me, but w'en yer git de res' o' de gang jes' ax' 'em if w'ot I tell yer ain't c'reekt, an' if I lie ter yer den lock de ole woman up."

"That is fair enough," interposed Sanford, who entertained a good deal of sympathy for the old woman on account of the treatment she had accorded him. "It will be time enough, in my opinion, to arrest her after we learn that she has really had some connection with this gang."

"I guess you are right," confessed the detective, "and I will act on that suggestion."

A smile of satisfaction overspread the face of the boy at this announcement.

"Tanks," he muttered. "I t'ought youse was er white man. It'd 'bout kill de ole woman ter lock her up after seein' me go ter jail, an' yer sha'n't never lose nuttin' by dis ack, see?"

By this time they had arrived at the Tombs prison, and Thad took his prisoner in to have

him committed, while Sanford remained in the cab.

The detective had Mickey committed on the general charge of disorderly conduct in threatening an officer, promising to get a warrant for him as an accomplice in the plot of attempted murder and robbery.

When he returned to the cab he had himself driven to a justice, where he procured the warrant.

The cab was a closed one, and during his ride to the office of the police justice Thad took the opportunity to remove his female apparel, which was of no further use to him, for the present, and was somewhat unwieldy.

He also made some other alterations in his disguise, such as adding a pair of whiskers to his face, so that any one seeing him enter the vehicle would not have recognized him as the same person on seeing him emerge therefrom.

Having procured the warrant for Mickey Mallon, he drove back to the Tombs and handed it to the sergeant in charge.

He was then about to leave the place to rejoin his companion, who had again waited in the cab, when his attention was attracted by the appearance of a tall man with a gray beard, accompanied by a very tall and angular female, dressed in black and closely veiled.

He had never seen the man before, and it was impossible to recognize the woman in her disguise, but for some reason his curiosity led him to retrace his steps to the desk of the sergeant whither they had gone, for the purpose of discovering their business there at that time of day. It was past the hour when visitors are admitted.

He slouched carelessly up to the desk, where the couple had already arrived, and was surprised to hear the man ask:

"Have you a prisoner here by the name of Terrence Mallon?"

"Just committed a few minutes ago," replied the sergeant.

"What is the offense charged?" questioned the man.

Where had Thad heard that voice?

It was strikingly familiar to him, and yet for the moment he could not recall where he had heard it.

Then of a sudden it came to him.

It was the voice of the old doctor whom they called Ainsworth.

There was a peculiarity about the voice which he could not forget, and yet how had the man managed to disguise himself in this manner?

"The charge, or charges," replied the sergeant, "there are two of them—are, first disorderly conduct in threatening an officer, and the other is complicity in a plot of robbery and attempted murder."

"The crime is not bailable, then?"

"No, sir."

"I am sorry for that," returned the man with a sorrowful tone of voice, "for, besides knowing that the young man is innocent of both offenses, I am prepared to furnish any amount of bonds that may be required."

"I am very sorry," said the sergeant, "but you must know that I have nothing to say in the matter. If you can get any judge with authority to do so, to accept your bond and admit the prisoner to bail, I shall be only too glad to let him out. But as it is, if you had a million dollars to offer I could not accept it."

The couple turned away disappointed and disconsolate.

Thad followed them out of the prison, and when they got outside they stopped on the sidewalk to discuss the matter.

"Where shall we go?" questioned the woman, whom Thad recognized by her voice as Mickey's mother.

"That is more than I can answer, but we must go somewhere," returned the man.

"Yes, we must get him out," interposed the woman.

"Indeed we must, for a great deal depends upon it."

"In what way?" questioned the woman suspiciously.

"Our own safety depends upon our getting him out, that is what I mean," rejoined the man shortly.

"You don't mean to insinuate that Teddy would divulge the secret, do you?"

"You never can tell. Stronger men than he have weakened under the pressure of

cross-examination and the promise of liberty."

"But Teddy will never weaken. He would die before he would reveal a single secret which has been intrusted to him."

"I would feel a great deal better if I could believe as you do. But that is not the question. We must get him out of there if it takes every dollar in the crowd to do it."

"You didn't try bribing the sergeant."

"It would have been useless. I knew the moment I saw his face that he was not that sort of a man. I think, however, that I know a judge whom a few thousands would influence. We will go there at once. Come."

And they stepped to the edge of the curb where the carriage in which they had arrived stood, and entering it, drove away.

"Follow that carriage wherever it goes, and fix your price," said Thad, addressing the driver, as he climbed into his own cab.

And the vehicle rolled away in the wake of the carriage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CHECKMATE.

THE carriage containing the two fugitives kept on Centre street and proceeded up-town at a brisk gait.

Thad's cab was not far behind them.

As they got further up-town they gradually worked over toward the East side, and were soon in Third avenue.

Burr guessed where they were making for then.

Justice Nolan lived up in that direction, and he knew that he had the name of taking bribes for bailing prisoners confined for murder and other unavailable crimes.

"We'll checkmate that little game," he observed, apparently to himself.

"What is that?" inquired Sanford.

"These people are making for a justice whom they believe they can bribe into accepting bail, and we will just be there as soon as they are and put a stop to it. The judge won't dare to do anything of the kind when he finds that I know all about the game."

"Pardon me," said the Californian, "but I don't quite understand you."

"Of course not," smiled the detective. "I forgot that you did not know who these people are whom we are following."

"No, I haven't the least idea, and I was wondering where you were going."

"Didn't you notice a man and woman coming out of the Tombs?"

"The couple that stood talking just outside?"

"Yes."

"I saw them, yes."

"Well, those are the people we are now following."

"I know, but who are they?"

"The woman is Mickey Mallon's mother—"

"The fortune-teller?" interrupted Sanford, eagerly.

"The same."

"And the man?"

"The man is a fellow by the name of Ainsworth—at least that is the name he goes by. He claims to be a doctor."

"Where are they going?"

"To call upon a justice to try to get him—by bribery, most likely—to release Mickey on bail. That was their mission to the Tombs. They appeared to think that they could bribe the sergeant, but it was no go."

"Did they try it?"

"No, they did not attempt it, but it seems, from what I overheard the man say, that he had intended to try it, but concluded when he saw the officer that he was not the man to be approached."

"Why do you think they are going to try the police justice?"

"I heard them say so."

"And you are going to shut them off?"

"I am going to try very hard."

In a few minutes the carriage turned out of Third avenue into a side street, where Thad knew the judge lived.

"I see that I am not mistaken," he remarked. "There is where they are driving for."

The carriage went but a block or two further when it stopped in front of one of a row of brown stone houses and the occupants got out and ascended the stoop.

A moment later the cab also stopped, and the couple were no more than admitted into the house, when the detective also went up the stoop.

"Is judge Nolan in?" he asked of the attendant who answered the door-bell.

"He is," was the reply. "Come in."

Thad walked into the hall, and was then informed that the judge was engaged.

"With the party who just came in?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the servant.

"Then take him this card and tell him that I must see him at once."

The attendant carried up the card, and in a few minutes returned with the information that the judge would see him at once.

A moment later the judge put in an appearance.

Thad had not left the hall, and stood there when the justice came down.

"Hello, Thad!" he said. "Is that you?"

"Yes, but how did you know me?"

"By your card," laughed the justice. "I never know you any other way. What can I do for you?"

"I have come to see you with reference to the couple who just came in, and who are now waiting for you."

"The couple up stairs?" said the judge, reddening.

"Yes."

"What about them?"

"Have they stated their business yet?"

"They say they have a son who has been falsely arrested and is locked up in the Tombs."

"That is the point. The fellow has not been falsely arrested. I arrested him myself, and I know what I am about."

"What has he done?"

"He is guilty of two crimes. One is bailable and the other is not. He is guilty of threatening an officer and also of complicity in a case of robbery and murder. They have come to you for the purpose of having him admitted to bail."

"On such a charge?" cried the judge with well simulated horror.

"Yes, and they have made their boasts that they will be able to bribe you into admitting the young man to bail."

"They'll do nothing of the kind, and what is more, they will get out of my house a blamed sight quicker than they came in!"

And the justice, who was a short, pudgy man, waddled off up-stairs in a high state of dudgeon, but Thad guessed his indignation was produced by the thought that he would be fooled out of the tip.

A moment later the couple came down stairs at a rapid gait, and the judge, who was at the top of the stairs, was calling after them:

"Get out of my house! How dare you make such a proposition to me?"

Burr chuckled to himself to think how he had beaten the little game as he hurried out and took his seat once more in the cab.

The carriage had already driven off, and the cab-driver asked if he should follow it.

"Yes, we may as well see where they go next," replied the detective.

And off they went in the wake of the retreating carriage.

They drove down Broadway this time until they reached Eighth street.

Turning into Eighth street, they stopped and were joined by two men who stood on the sidewalk.

The two men stood alongside of the carriage and an earnest conversation ensued, lasting several minutes.

Meanwhile Thad's cab had pulled up within a few yards of them, but not near enough to overhear the conversation.

Presently the man alighted from the carriage and the three men walked off together while the carriage went on West.

Realizing that it would be folly to attempt to follow the men in the cab, Thad whispered his intentions to his companion and instantly alighted.

He was followed by Sanford, and the two started in pursuit of the three outlaws.

They walked a block down Broadway and turned into Seventh street, and after going half a block, stopped in a saloon in the basement.

Thad and his companion followed, leisurely, that the men might not suspect their mission.

The men had already seated themselves about a table which stood in an alcove, ordered drinks and were engaged in earnest conversation.

Thad and Sanford took a seat in another alcove which was divided from the one in which the men sat by a thin partition.

The detective could hear everything they said, and appeared to believe they were safe, for they took no precaution to prevent themselves from being heard.

Burr had not been able to recognize any of the men except the doctor, and it was only conjecture in his case, but he guessed that they belonged to the party of villains who had attempted to murder Florence, and were doubtless in disguise.

"This is the very worst thing that could have happened," observed the doctor. "That fellow is sure to divulge the whole business."

"There is no doubt of that," returned another, "in case the screws are put upon him. But what are we to do? You say that you could do nothing with either the sergeant or the justice."

"I do not know," responded the doctor despondently.

"Are there no other justices whom you can fix?"

"None, so far as I know. What puzzles me is why Nolan refused. He was never known to refuse a bribe before."

"Perhaps he was watched."

"That is just it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I remember now that somebody came in a moment after we did and called the judge down. Before that he had appeared as though he might yield with a little persuasion and sugaring, but when he came back to us he was in a terrible fury and would listen to nothing. He actually ordered us out of his house."

"That is the meaning of it then," remarked the other speaker. "And my opinion is that it was the identical detective who had been on our track all along. The best thing we can do is to fix him."

"How do you mean, with money?"

"Either with money or a bullet. We might try the effect of money, and if that don't fetch him, then give him a dose of cold lead."

"That is all well enough to talk about now, but don't you know that if that fellow squeals the whole police force will be on our track like a lot of hounds?"

There was a silence for some minutes, and then the man who had not spoken up to this time put in.

"I have a plan," he began.

"What is it?" chimed in the other two.

"A plan to get the boy out of the limbo."

"Tell us what it is, quick," cried the other two eagerly.

"You know I am pretty good on the disguise?"

"Yes, yes."

"I will make myself up as a woman, and, in company with old Molly, I'll call upon Mickey in the morning."

"Well?"

"I'll watch my chance when there is nobody about and chloroform the guide, take the keys away from him and release Mickey."

The other two men laughed scornfully at this wild proposition.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It is the craziest scheme I ever heard a man propose," observed the doctor.

"Why crazy?"

"Because, in the first place, if you have ever been in the Tombs during the visiting hour, you know there is never a moment when there is not a crowd present. And in the next place, there are always half a dozen other guards either on that floor or the floor above."

"Well, suppose there were fifty people present? The manner in which I propose to manage this thing will be such a surprise to every one that they will be panic-stricken and won't know what to do until the thing is done."

"You may as well abandon that scheme at once," laughed the doctor, "for it won't work. Our only chance in that direction is to sugar all the guards and induce them to let the boy escape. But a better plan will be to save ourselves while we have a chance."

"How?" asked the scheming young man.

Then followed a whispered conversation which the detective could not catch, at the conclusion of which the doctor said:

"That is our only plan."

"But that cannot be accomplished to-night?" objected one of the others.

"No, but we can keep shady till to-morrow night, and then shove out."

This appeared to be a hint, the nature of which Thad thought he understood.

As he understood it, they intended to have the Crewless Craft towed out and all make their escape in that way.

"In that case we will leave the boy to his fate, eh?" asked one of the men.

"Yes."

"That would hardly be the thing, would it?"

"He would be all right. They can prove nothing against him, and besides, if he chooses to turn state's evidence, as he probably will do any way, that will insure his release."

"It is settled then that we will go to-morrow night?" said one of the party.

"Yes," replied the doctor, who appeared to be the controlling spirit. "In the mean time see that the others are notified."

"Somebody will have to secure a tug."

"I'll attend to that," volunteered the doctor.

"Well, let us go," suggested one.

"Which way?"

"I'm going home," replied the first speaker.

"Yes, we may as well go," remarked the doctor. "We can do no more, to-night."

"How about the detective?" inquired one.

"Oh, let him go," returned the doctor.

"He won't be able to bother us long. What we want to do is to make preparations to get out of here as soon as possible."

The three men then arose and left the saloon.

Burr was close upon them when they reached the street, but they only went to the corner of Broadway, where they separated, each going in a different direction.

This was an old game of crooks, and Thad understood the motive perfectly.

It was to prevent the possibility of any one who might have been shadowing them from following more than one of them.

To Sanford's surprise the detective chose to follow neither of them, but stood motionless watching them until they were out of sight.

"Why did you let them go?" he asked.

"What else was to be done?" returned Burr. "I could not divide myself up into three parts. And there is no use of arresting one until I get the whole gang, which I shall do before another twenty-four hours. I could not very well arrest these fellows without a warrant anyway, but when I get them all corralled, as I shall pretty soon, I will swoop down upon them and take them all in."

"But suppose some of them give you the slip?"

"There is no danger of that."

"Why?"

"The boodle. One will not leave lest the others should cheat him out of his share of the gold."

"A good plan would be to find out where the gold is, and watch it, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, and—"

Thad was about to tell his companion that he knew, or thought he knew where the gold was, but decided that he would not just then, and the two men walked on in silence for some distance, and then parted with the understanding that they should meet the following afternoon, and head the outlaws off in their attempt to escape.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE THICK OF IT.

"WHAT now?" queried Sanford as soon as the detective rejoined Burr the following afternoon.

"We've got to go away down-town," replied Burr. "There is a boat down there which they call the Crewless Craft, and I suspect these fellows have the gold hidden away there."

"Did this fellow you arrested tell you about it?"

"Yes, he is of opinion that the money is deposited there, and, although I would not

be willing to trust him very far, the story is so probable that I am inclined to accept it."

"Why do they call it the Crewless Craft?"

"Because, although the boat has been seen to come into port and go out any number of times, no one has ever seen a living soul aboard of her."

"This is some fake," laughed Sanford.

"I do not go much on the spook business."

"Neither do I, but I was aboard the craft, and, although I heard talking and the sound of revelry, I was able to see no one, except once, and then I saw Harry Disdale."

"Then you may be sure the thing is a fraud."

"I believe so myself, but, as I say, the thing was very mysterious."

By this time they had walked as far as Eighth avenue, and the detective calling a hack, they got in and drove down to Old Slip, where the mysterious craft had last been seen.

Burr had again disguised himself as a woman.

The night was very dark, and few persons were to be seen about this part of the city at this time of night.

Alighting near the slip, the two men walked out on the pier nearly to the end, and then across the decks of the numerous canal boats moored in the slip.

At length they came to the last one in the fleet, and Burr paused.

Pointing toward the mysterious craft which lay nearest the breakwater, he said:

"There is the Crewless Craft."

"She looks crewless enough now, I must say," answered the other man.

"She is pretty dark."

"I don't believe there is anybody aboard of her."

"It would surprise me if we found any one," assented the detective. "But if we don't, it won't be for want of searching."

"Do you think of going aboard of her?"

"Certainly."

Sanford shivered.

"What's the matter?" laughed Burr.

"The thought of going aboard of such a looking craft makes the cold chills run over me."

"I thought you didn't believe in spooks?"

"So I don't, but I believe that craft is manned by different stuff."

"Live ghosts, eh?"

"Yes."

"That is the kind, if there are any. Come on."

And the detective jumped down upon the guard of the boat.

Sanford hesitated a moment, and then followed.

Neither spoke a word from that on.

There was a ghostliness about the place that commanded them to silence.

Burr walked around the bow to the other side of the boat, and his companion followed him.

They soon came to the door leading down into the hold, which was open as it had been when Thad was there last, and so were the windows looking into the cabin.

All was in total darkness.

The detective paused and listened.

He expected to hear the sound of laughter and talking as he had on the previous occasion, but all was silent now.

"Let us go down into the hold and see what we can find," said the detective.

Another shudder ran over Sanford, but he said nothing, and followed his leader.

Burr passed through the narrow door and proceeded to descend the still narrower stairs.

The door at the bottom was also open, and he passed on out into the dungeon-like hold.

"This is a cheerful sort of place," whispered Sanford.

"Very," whispered the detective in return.

"What do you expect to find down here?"

"It is hard to tell."

"In my opinion we will find nothing."

"You are probably right. But let us have a little light."

With that Burr struck a match and lit his lantern.

The light flashed over the ghostly place, but nothing was to be seen but bare boards.

They searched the hold from stem to stern, but without making any discovery.

"There is no use of wasting any more time here," growled Sanford, who was tired

of this sort of adventure. "We may as well go."

"Not yet."

"What now?"

"Wait and I'll show you."

Thad returned to the stairway, which was located between the two walls of the hull.

He had had an idea.

If there was a double wall on this side of the boat, why was there not the same arrangement on the other side?"

He made a thorough search of the stairs, but there appeared nothing out of the way about them.

But as he continued to examine them he noticed a hook on the end of one of the steps which fell into a staple.

It was evidently there for some purpose, and he determined to find out what it was.

Pulling the hook up out of the staple, he found that the stairs were loosened by the operation, and he was encouraged to experiment further.

Stepping back a few steps, he pulled up on the stairs.

To his great satisfaction they came up, leaving a passageway behind them.

It was about as wide as the door at the foot of the steps, and appeared to pass around the side of the boat.

"Here we are," he called to his companion, who had been watching his operations curiously.

"What have you now?"

"Here is a secret passage, and I have no doubt but it will clear up the mystery of the Crewless Craft."

So saying, the detective plunged into the passage and proceeded to explore its depths.

As he supposed, it ran around the side of the boat, and he continued until he had reached the opposite side.

He had shut off the light of his lantern while making the trip around.

This he did to avoid being surprised.

But when the opposite side of the boat was reached, he paused to listen a moment, and, hearing no sound, he shot the slide of his lantern.

As its light flashed over the narrow room the two men uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise and gratification.

There before them sat a strong box, the lid of which was open, and it was filled almost to the top with gold coin!

"Here we are!" exclaimed the detective. "Here is the wealth we have been looking for."

The other man could not speak for some seconds, but stood with distended eyes and mouth, gazing at the immense treasure.

"There's more than George had," he finally observed. "A good deal more. What he brought here for Florry wouldn't fill that box more than a quarter full."

A thought occurred to the detective.

"It isn't possible that he could have turned all the property into money and brought it all with him, is it?" he questioned.

"No, it isn't possible," answered the other. "Anyway, he would have been mighty foolish to do it."

"Because," pursued the detective, "there looks to be about two millions in that pile."

The more he reflected upon the subject the more he was inclined to believe that George Sanford had sold the property of the girl and brought the money with him.

And this led to another thought, or suspicion, rather.

Was it not just possible that he had intended to keep it himself, but these other parties discovering his secret, had got ahead of him, and murdered him for it?

He did not reveal his suspicions to Sanford, however, and after looking about the place a little more, proceeded around the passage to assure himself that there were none of the gang concealed about the place.

Having satisfied himself on this point, he and his companion left the hold by the way they had come, Burr carefully fastening down the stairs as he had found it.

When they had reached the point of the guards where they had jumped down from the deck of the taller boat, Burr stopped.

"Go out to the street," he said, "and find a couple of policemen and have them come here. I will remain here till you come back."

Sanford did as he was requested, and in

a short time he returned with two policemen.

"What's up, old lady?" demanded one of them as he stopped to look at the detective in his queer make-up.

"Come down here, and I'll show you," replied Burr.

The cop hesitated, but finally jumped down.

"Now what is it?" he growled.

Thad flashed his lamp and showed the officer his badge.

"What the devil—?"

"S-s-s-sh!" admonished the detective. "There's game below," pointing at the mysterious boat. "I'd like to ask you two officers to keep your eye on that craft till I send in a call to Headquarters for a detail."

The officer gazed at the dark, mystic craft for a long time, and at length growled:

"See here, ain't that that ghost boat I hear them talking so much about?"

"I guess it is, but what of it?"

"I don't want to have anything to do with it," replied the superstitious policeman.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of nothing," he growled, "but all the same I don't want to have nothing to do with that craft, after all I've heard about it."

"Very well, then, go out and send in a call for a detail of ten men. Tell the sergeant who wants them, and I will wait here."

"What'll I tell him's up?"

"Say that I expect to make a haul of a lot of crooks aboard of a canal boat down here."

The two policemen went away, and Burr and his companion remained to watch the craft.

"What was the reason the policemen wouldn't stay?" questioned Sanford.

"Afraid."

"You don't say!"

"Fact. That will give you some idea what a reputation the craft has got. There is not a policeman or boatman about these slips that could be hired to go aboard of her for love or money."

"And yet there is nothing to fear."

"You saw how much there was."

"Yes."

"Still, that false wall and secret passage would deceive the best of them. They fooled me in great style at first."

In the course of half an hour the detail from Headquarters arrived, and, as they knew nothing of the gruesome reputation of the boat, they went on guard, while Burr and Sanford went up-town.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A RUN-IN.

WHEN Burr had placed the guard over the Crewless Craft, with instructions to arrest any one coming near it, he and his companion got into the cab and drove to the detective's house in Thirty-fourth street.

Here he changed his disguise, making himself up as a middle-aged man with fiery red hair and beard.

In this disguise he was confident the outlaws would not recognize him.

He then drove, still accompanied by Sanford, to the Forty-third street house.

He and his companion had alighted some distance from the house, so as not to attract the attention of the occupants, in case they should be on the look-out, and walked the rest of the way.

As they approached the stoop, a slender young man ran up the steps and rung the bell.

Burr paused to see the outcome.

The door was soon opened and a woman appeared at it.

A conversation of some duration, but in too low a tone for the detective to hear, passed.

The detective, close beside the stoop, strained his ears in vain to catch something of the conversation, but the people spoke too low for that.

However, as the young man was about to take his leave, he said:

"At the old house, eh?"

"Yes," replied the woman at the door.

"All right, I'll go down there," said the youth. "Good-by, Bettie."

"Good-by," responded the woman, and closed the door.

This was enough.

Thad had his cue.

He guessed from the fragment of conversation that the people he was anxious to find were at the old house in Greenwich Village.

His first move after that was to telephone to Police Headquarters for another detail of men, to be sent to Greenwich Village.

He then took his seat in the cab once more and drove to the old house, stopping some distance away, however.

Stationing himself across the road from the house, he and his companion, he took up his watch of the old house.

He had not been there long before the rumble of a wagon notified him of the approach of the patrol wagon.

He hastened to meet it, and had the wagon stop some distance away from the house.

"I'm not quite ready for you yet," he exclaimed, to the sergeant in command. "I want to make sure that my game is in before treeing it."

The wagon-load of blue-coats was then driven into a side street where it would not be apt to attract the attention of the outlaws in the event of their coming to or going from the old house.

Burr then returned to his post.

Presently the youth whom he had seen in Forty-third street came along.

The detective watched him.

The youth tripped up to the front door, and, without a moment's hesitation, put a key into the door, opened it and went in.

Who could he be? mused the detective.

He must be a new acquisition to the gang.

But while he was still pondering the question, a close carriage drove up in front of house.

This was significant.

It was now after midnight.

The occupants of the carriage must be some of the outlaws.

The detective had not long to wait for a solution of the mystery.

First one and then another of the occupants alighted and strode briskly toward the old house.

There were four in all.

It was too dark to distinguish their faces, but the short, misshapen form of one was sufficient proof of who the party were.

The four men quickly passed into the house.

"That's our game," remarked the detective, addressing Sanford. "Please step round and ask the sergeant to fetch his squad here, but tell him to make as little noise as possible, as I do not want to give these fellows a chance to escape."

Sanford departed.

Five minutes later he returned, and with him ten blue-coats.

"Now, sergeant," instructed Burr, "surround the house, and allow no one to escape. Meanwhile I will try to get inside and make sure that the right parties are there."

The men were silently placed about the house so that it would have been impossible for any one to escape.

Burr then proceeded to the rear.

His plan was to climb the tree as he had done before and effect an entrance at the upper window.

As he glanced up, he saw that there was a light shining from the identical window he had intended entering.

He was in a quandary what to do.

If the men were on that side of the house it would be impossible for him to get in.

He was standing close to the rear door of the house.

He was still looking up at the window and pondering what to do, when he was suddenly surprised by the opening of the door.

Supposing it some of the gang, he prepared for the worst.

Drawing his revolver, he put himself upon the defensive.

But what was his surprise to hear himself addressed by name in a boyish treble voice!

He recognized the voice at once as the same he had heard at the door of the Forty-third street house.

"Come," admonished the voice. "They

are all up-stairs. You can have a chance to hear all they say."

Thad looked behind him.

Sanford stood at his heels.

He was eager to see the outlaws.

The detective beckoned him to follow, and entered the door.

"Easy!" whispered the youth, leading the way along the dark hall. "Right this way."

As he spoke he put back his hand and took that of the detective in order to lead him along.

Burr could not but wonder at the softness and delicacy of the hand.

Who could this youth be?

Meanwhile they groped their way along the dungeon-like passage, till they came to the rickety stairway.

Softly climbing this, the detective soon found himself on the floor where he had been only the night before.

The door of the room into which he had unconsciously gone on the former occasion was standing partially open.

Without a word the youth led the way in to this.

The hall and this room were dimly illuminated by the light from the next room, stealing through the folds of the heavy curtains which separated the two rooms.

The men were not in the same room they had occupied before.

This time they were in the back room, whereas before they were in the front.

An animated conversation was in progress, and Thad lost no time in getting in a position where he could hear to the best advantage.

Placing himself close to the *portiere*, he listened.

Disdale was speaking.

"This all comes of not taking my advice," he was saying. "If the gold had been left here, it would never have been discovered."

"It hasn't been discovered yet," protested another voice, which sounded like that of old man.

"It won't take them long to discover it, though," insisted the other. "If they did not suspect something they would never have put the guards there."

"The fault was in not getting away last night," ventured still another, which appeared to be Carter. "As soon as we discovered the flight of the girl we should have got the boat out of the slip and vanished."

"I do not believe they will ever discover the gold," protested the old man. "How many people have gone into the hold, and not one has ever discovered the secret passage. Even that detective, who is no fool, tried it, and failed."

"I do not believe they will ever discover it," assented Carter. "In the first place, you could not hire one of those policemen to go inside of her for any price."

"That is so," interposed the old man. "Besides, here is one thing which none of you appear to have thought of. There is not a living soul that knows anything about the gold."

"Why, to be sure," said Carter. "That never occurred to me before. There is nobody in this city that knows anything about it."

A silence of some minutes followed, and then Disdale said:

"Well, what is the best thing to be done?"

"My advice," answered the old man, "would be to lie quiet and let matters take their course for a while. The police will watch the boat for a few days, and then, finding nothing, they will finally withdraw, and we can then quietly slip back, have the boat towed out, and secrete our treasure somewhere else."

"But what shall we do in the mean time?"

"Keep quiet. A good plan would be to scatter out and each go to a separate hotel."

"Or leave the city."

"No, I wouldn't advise that. This detective is not upon our track, and we will only make ourselves the more conspicuous by leaving town. No, I should say remain here. There is no place in the world like a large city for hiding oneself in."

"And the girl?" questioned Disdale.

"Let her go," answered the old man promptly.

"But won't she make trouble?"

"How?"

"Try to recover the property."

"She may, but what can she do? She has nothing to fight us with, and its uphill work going to law without money."

"This gold, then, represents the whole of the estate, does it?"

"Every cent."

"That was a clever ruse," laughed Disdale, "but you are all right, no matter how about the rest of us."

"Yes, I am all right," replied the old man. "I am dead."

"Well, I propose we break up at once and go to our several hotels, wherever they are to be selected," remarked Disdale.

"I second that motion," put in the old man.

Without more parley, they all began to prepare to take their departure.

"Now is our time," whispered the detective. "Get your pistol ready, Sanford. Have you a pistol, young man?" he questioned the youth.

"You bet I have," replied the young chap, drawing out a revolver.

"Very well, ready, now!"

And the three stepped quickly from behind the curtains and stood confronting the outlaws.

Three revolvers were leveled upon the quartet, and Burr thundered in a terrible voice:

"Surrender!"

The four men were taken completely by surprise.

They had not imagined that there was a detective within a mile of them.

Frightened and powerless, they stood like four trembling children, staring wildly at their captors.

"Not a move!" yelled the detective. "Throw down your arms this instant, or you are all dead men!"

They hesitated, but finally, one by one surrendered, and in a twinkling Burr had the irons upon them.

All save the old man.

He had appeared to submit until it came to putting the handcuffs on him, and then he grappled with the detective.

A lively tussle ensued, in which he lost his gray beard and wig.

As soon as Sanford caught a glimpse of his denuded face, he exclaimed:

"My God! My brother George!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONFESSION.

GEORGE SANFORD did not appear to have recognized his brother until he had spoken, and when he did the effect was magical.

He appeared to be completely overwhelmed with emotion.

He stood staring helplessly at Laurence, and offered no further resistance.

Not another word was uttered on either side.

Burr silently adjusted the handcuffs on his wrists, and the silence of the scene was growing oppressive.

Then everybody was startled by the sound of a sob.

The detective glanced in the direction from which it had come, and was astonished to see that it emanated from the youth.

But this was not the sole cause of his astonishment.

The moment he caught sight of the youth's face, which he had not seen in the light before, he recognized it.

It was no other than Florence Disdale, attired in boys' clothing.

"Oh, Uncle George!" she sobbed. "Who would have thought that you could have been guilty of this?"

"I thought you were dead," murmured his brother in a husky voice. "And would to God it had been so, instead of this!"

The culprit made no response to all this.

He stood with bent head, his eyes upon the floor, and the muscles of his face twitching painfully.

Three of the four prisoners were removed to the street and turned over to the police, but George Sanford was missing.

What could have become of him?

His brother was also missing.

Was there a plot between them by which George was to be allowed to escape?

It looked like it.

Thad hastened back into the house and went directly to the room where he had made the arrest, but no one was there.

Burr was disgusted.

Never in all his experience had a prisoner succeeded in making his escape in that manner before.

The house was searched from top to bottom, but without avail, the two men had gone.

Somehow in descending the dark stairs they had given the detective the slip, and were no doubt far away by this time.

Thad realized the futility of attempting to look for them that night, and gave it up, devoting his attention to the other three prisoners, whom he had driven to the Tombs and committed.

Meanwhile he could not help reverting to the remark of Laurence Sanford that this was a family affair, and now that that very individual had taken the first opportunity to assist his brother to escape after being guilty of the crime he had, the detective saw more fully than ever the force of the remark.

But let us go back to the two brothers Sanford and see what had really become of them.

It will be remembered that "the old man," as he had been supposed to be, struggled to prevent the detective from putting the handcuffs on him, and during the struggle his wig and false beard came off, re-disclosing his real identity.

This revelation produced such a sensation upon all three, brother, niece and detective, that the business of putting on the irons was entirely overlooked and forgotten.

Nevertheless, when Burr started with his prisoners for the street George Sanford was among them and Laurence was acting as one of the detective's guards.

When they got into the unlighted hallway George, who had been weeping like an infant ever since the discovery of his identity, suddenly put his arm about his brother's neck and whispered the one word "brother" in his ear.

As he did so he adroitly slipped out of the crowd, pulling his brother with him.

Laurence was too much overcome with grief to resist, and for the moment the temptation to save his brother came upon him so strong that he was powerless to resist it.

The two brothers stood there on the dark staircase in each other's embrace until the detective and the other three prisoners had reached the foot of the stairs, and then George, pressing his brother still more firmly in his arms, whispered the words:

"Larry—brother—for god's sake save me!"

That was enough.

The affectionate and tender-hearted brother was unable to turn a deaf ear to the appeal, and replied in the fullness of his heart:

"Yes, brother, criminal as you are, I will save you. Which way shall we go?"

George, who knew all the odd turns and quaint corners of the old rookery and eager to escape the justice that awaited him, replied:

"This way. Come!"

Leading the way, he mounted to the top of the house, and there, to the other brother's surprise, he opened a secret door in the wall, revealing a secret stairway.

Without a word George entered this and began to descend, and his brother, knowing nothing of where he was being led, followed.

They descended the stairway, which was very steep and narrow, until it seemed to Laurence that they must be several stories below the basement of the house, when they finally came into a subterranean passage or tunnel.

It was exceedingly dark, and George lit a match that his brother might see how to proceed, and started along the passage.

Not a word passed between them, and they kept along the passage for a long distance.

At length they came out into what appeared to be a large room, and George struck another match in order that they might survey their surroundings.

Laurence then saw that the place appeared to be the basement of a house, and from the noise overhead, he guessed that it was the basement of a saloon.

In this he was not mistaken, for a moment later his brother opened a door at one end of

the room and, followed by his brother, began to ascend a flight of dirty stairs.

In a few moments they had reached the top, where George opened another door, and the brothers found themselves in the back room of a low saloon.

"To avert suspicion on the part of these people," remarked George, seating himself at a table, "we will sit down here and order a drink. We can then go about our business."

Laurence silently complied with the suggestion and seated himself at the table and George ordered the drinks.

The two men sat and drank their beer in silence for some time, but after a while George, in stealing a furtive glance at his brother, noticed that his brow was dark and scowling and the sight filled him with dread.

"What is the matter, brother?" he ventured. "Are you already sorry that you rescued me from the clutches of the law?"

Laurence looked up with a start.

"No, not that exactly," he said in a depressed tone. "I was just thinking what was to become of you—and of myself, also. Now that you have blackened our name with your infamous crimes, I will not dare go back to San Francisco and face the people who have known us both as honest men. If I give you up to justice and you are hanged our fair name will be tarnished for all time, and if I help you to escape, the world will hold me in the same light that it holds you, will believe me equally guilty."

To his astonishment and disgust, the brother received this with a sneer and even laughed disdainfully.

"It's too bad about you and your fair name!" he sneered. "But I am in for it. What are you going to do about it? If you think you would fare better in the estimation of the virtuous world, I shall go and give myself up and suffer the penalty of my crimes. It will be tough on me, but a great deal better than to have your fair name suffer."

Laurence was silent.

The sting of ingratitude was too deep and painful to recover from at once, and for a long time he sat with his face buried in his hands.

At length he raised his head and said:

"This is cruel, brother—more cruel than I could have imagined, coming from you. You know I am willing to do anything which will be for the best. It is not for myself that I care so much, but I have a family, and even you should not forget that we have a poor old mother whom the news of this thing will kill."

George was silent, but his lip curled in scorn.

"It is all well enough," he finally said, musingly, "to thrust these things at a man who has erred—when the wrong has been done and he cannot retrace his steps—cannot undo what has been done. What would you have me do?"

Laurence did not answer at once, but drawing his revolver from his pocket, laid it on the table.

George eyed the weapon curiously, and wondered at the meaning of the action.

Then Laurence spoke in a low, earnest, disappointed tone.

"My duty would be to leave you to the executioner who awaits you; but I cannot forget that I have the misfortune to be your brother."

He paused and took a memorandum-book from his pocket and laid it on the table beside the pistol.

His manner had undergone a radical change since entering the room.

From the broken and sympathetic brother, he had suddenly developed into a hard, practical and unsympathetic man of business.

George regarded every movement with the greatest interest but with the same cynical smile.

"Take this book," pursued the brother, "and this pencil, and write a full confession of your crime, and sign it. Then when you have completed this, take this revolver and put an end to the life which has been a curse to yourself and all who have loved and cherished you. And may Heaven forgive you!"

Laurence then arose and started toward the door.

But before he reached it George beckoned him, and he paused.

The Frisco sharper drew a revolver from his own breast and said:

"Your firearms are useless, sir. I am still provided, as you see, and it is safe to say that I will never again be taken alive. Only—"

"Well?"

"I do not choose to kill myself—at least not just yet."

"Then you are a coward! Had you not better do that than suffer the death of ignominy awaiting you if you are captured?"

"As I said, I shall not be taken alive. But what I desire, and what I hope for is to escape entirely."

"Then," said his brother, stepping to the side of the table and putting out his hand for the revolver, "must I do it for you?"

But the cautious criminal divined his intention and caught up the weapon and quickly concealed it in his bosom.

Laurence stepped back and glowered at him.

"Very well," he said. "I have got you thus far. Save yourself. I shall neither aid nor intercept your escape."

Again he moved toward the door, but was again checked by the criminal brother.

"One moment," he cried. "As I said, I do not wish to destroy myself, and shall not do it except as a last resort to prevent arrest. Not because I am a coward, but because, like all living creatures, life is still sweet to me. I intend, if possible, to get away from here—so far away that the minions of the law will never molest me, and then turn over a new leaf and live an honest life, such as I have always lived before I was tempted by that accursed gold."

He paused and his brother offered no response, except a deep-drawn sigh.

"But," pursued George, in a humbler tone, "it will be impossible for me to fly without money, and I have none. Supply me with the means of escape, and I swear that neither you nor any of the family shall ever hear of me again. Will you do it?"

"Never!" replied the other, firmly.

"Very well. I shall make an effort to escape and, of course, be captured. When my trial comes on and I am questioned as to the means of my escape, I shall say that it was you who assisted me. You will then be arrested as an accomplice, and not only have the mortification of knowing that your brother has been hanged, but of suffering imprisonment yourself. How does the situation appeal to you now, my dear, virtuous brother?"

This mental picture had its effect upon the brother.

He turned ghastly white and became very nervous.

"Well," he began in a tremulous voice, "let us end this thing at once. I see now that I should never have yielded to the temptation of attempting to save you. But that is now too late. What do you want of me?"

"As I stated before—money."

"How much?"

"All that you have here. I may need more, but I will manage to communicate with you if I do. But give me what you have with you, and be quick about it."

"I have about a thousand dollars here," said the brother, taking out his pocketbook. "Will that be enough?"

"It is little enough for a man who yesterday thought himself a millionaire. But let me have it. I expected at least five thousand dollars. That will help me to get to Canada, perhaps. But I will not be able to remain there, and will have to have more money before long. As I say, I will try to communicate with you so that you can send me more."

"But you promised that I should never hear from you again if I helped you to escape."

"So you shall not—directly. I will communicate in such a way that you will not feel that it is I with whom you are dealing, and after I receive the additional four thousand, you shall never hear of me again, directly or indirectly."

Instead of replying to this speech, Laurence tossed the pocketbook on the table in front of his brother.

The sharper picked it up and thrust it into his bosom.

Laurence for the third time made toward the door.

"One thing more, brother," said George, intercepting him.

Laurence stopped, but did not speak.

"It is already known to that detective that you assisted me to escape, and you will be arrested as soon as apprehended. Let me fix the matter. Bad as I am, I am not insensible to your intended kindness, and feel that it would not be just for you to suffer for my sins. Here in your book which you have left, I will write, not the confession of my crime, which you desired, but a statement to the effect that you were not responsible for my escape. Will you accept it as part payment for what you have done for me, and as a token of my love for you as a brother?"

"Do not speak of your love for me as a brother!" hissed Laurence in a disgusted tone. "If you had had a proper love for me you would never have disgraced me by your crimes."

"Nevertheless, I have always entertained the highest regard, not to say the warmest affection for you as a brother, and still entertain it, no matter what you may think to the contrary. But this act of mine is as much in consideration of your family and our old mother as it is of my love for you."

Laurence stepped quickly to the side of the table.

"Yes," he said. "In consideration of my little children, my wife and our old mother, write it. Heartily as I abhor a lie, I will submit to one rather than that dishonor should come to them."

Without another word, George began to write.

At the end of ten minutes he handed the book to his brother, who read the following:

"TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:—"

"This is to certify that my escape from the detective who had placed me under arrest was in no wise due to the assistance or in accordance with the advice or counsel of my brother, Laurence M. Sanford. That it was due to my own presence of mind and an opportunity which offered itself while passing through the dark hallway of the house where I was taken. The fact of my brother being missing at the same time, is due to the fact that he followed me and tried with all the energy he possessed to recapture me, but failed."

"This I swear in presence of Heaven, from whom I hope for mercy in the end."

"(Signed) GEORGE J. SANFORD."

"NEW YORK, OCT. 24, 18—."

"There, that ought to exonerate you in the eyes of the law as well as those of the world," observed George, handing him the book.

Laurence made no reply, but after reading it over, put the book into his pocket.

He then started with a quick nervous step for the door, simply saying:

"Good-by."

But as he reached the door and was about to push it open, it was rudely thrust open from the opposite side, and in rushed Thad Burr, followed by half a dozen policemen, and Florence in boy's clothing.

The Frisco Sharper jumped up and made for the basement door, but before he reached it, half a dozen policemen came out of it and confronted him.

"The jig is up, my man!" cried Thad. "Surrender!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A COUNTER-MOVE.

WHEN Burr discovered that his one prisoner was missing and the perfidy of his late friend, to say that he was disgusted, is to state it mildly.

However, he had faith in his own powers to believe that it would only be a matter of time when he would run this arch-villain down, and consoled himself with the thought.

He said nothing about the matter to the captain of the squad who had come to help him with his capture, and mounting the patrol wagon with the others, rode to the Tombs.

All the way along he was communing with himself and trying to solve the mystery of how the prisoner had given him the slip, and also trying to divine where he had gone.

Having searched the old house thoroughly, he knew that he could not be concealed there, and as he had had a guard at the rear of the house, he was equally positive that the prisoner and his brother had not escaped in that direction.

This led to the suspicion that there must be a secret outlet to the place, and this, admitting its probability, explained in a measure the mystery of how the occupants of the house had managed to come and go without being seen by the neighbors.

The more he pondered the subject the more fully convinced he became that his theory was correct.

Therefore, as soon as he got to the prison he took the opportunity of questioning the prisoners he had just taken.

But they were one and all non-committal.

Not one of them could be induced to reveal a thing about the supposed secret outlet, although he had made them the most unheard-of liberal offers.

Finally he gave it up and was about to abandon the idea, thinking that his only plan would be to go to the old house and find the passage, if such a thing existed, himself.

But he had no more than come to this conclusion than he thought of Mickey.

"There is my opportunity," he reflected. "If that chap does not reveal all to me, it will then be time to look for the secret myself. I'll see him."

As may be supposed, it was not far from daylight, and long past the hour when visitors were supposed to be admitted to the prisoners, but when he stated his case to the sergeant, whom he happened to be acquainted with, the latter kindly permitted him to visit Mickey's cell in company with one of the guards.

As was natural, they found Mickey asleep and it took some shaking to arouse him.

But they finally succeeded, and then came a second difficulty.

The boy, naturally stubborn at all times, was doubly so now that he had been disturbed in his slumbers.

It did not take Thad long to bring him round, however.

"What d'yer want ter know?" he growled.

"I want to know something about the lay of the old house in Greenwich Village," replied Thad, good-naturedly.

"Wot's it wort'?" growled Mickey, ever open for the chance of a tip.

"It will be worth a good deal to you, Mickey," replied Burr. "It may be worth your liberty."

"Is dat so?"

Mickey was wide awake instantly.

"That is true."

"Den it goes. Wot d'yer want?"

"There is a secret passage leading out of the old Eighth street house by which the gang have been in the habit of coming and going."

"Dat's right."

"I thought so."

"Youse hit it. Say, youse is dead slick. How did yer come ter fin' it?"

"The fact is, I haven't found it, Mickey. I want you to tell me where it is."

The boy opened his eyes very wide.

"Yer say yer hain't found it?"

"No, I have not found it."

"Den how did yer know dat dere was one?"

"I surmised it."

"Come again?"

"I guessed there was one."

"Wot made yer guess it?"

"By one of the prisoners escaping without my being able to tell where he went."

"I thought youse'd run em all in."

"Not quite. All but one, though."

"An' he give yer de cold finger, eh?"

"He escaped."

"He mus' 'a' been er slick one, too."

"Yes, so he was, but where is that secret passage?"

"Oh, yer want ter know dat?"

"Yes."

"An' how much do I get?"

"Your liberty, most likely."

"But not fer shure?"

"Well, you'll stand a pretty good show. State's evidence, you know, usually results in acquittal."

"I'll stan' a better show dan if I didn't tell, eh?"

"Yes, a great deal better."

"All right, here goes."

But he hesitated.

A thought seemed to have occurred to him.

"Lemme see, youse ain't got all dese blokes runned in, has yer?"

"All but one, and I will soon have him, if you will tell me where the secret passage is."

"'Cause, as long as any o' dem blokes is out my life ain't wort' shucks if I squeal."

"They will all be inside very soon. Besides, if they were not they would never know that you squealed."

"Dat's square?"

"I pledge you my honor."

"Good! Here goes, den."

"Tell me the truth."

"Oh, I'll give yer a square deal."

"Very well, go on."

"Go to de top o' de joint—de top flure, I means—an' walk over to de wes' end o' de garret."

"Yes?"

"Dere you'll see er cubbard. It looks like er cubbard, but it ain't; it's er door. Open dat door and youse'll fin' er stairway leadin' down to de basement."

"And stop?"

"No, dere's er tunnel w'ot runs off, an' youse jest foller dat tunnel, an' it'll bring youse out in er saloon on 'Leventh avenoo. Dat's all."

"What kind of a place is the saloon?"

"Were yer gits booze, see?"

"I mean, is it a low sort of a place?"

"Dat's right. Has er raw man fer breakfast every mornin' in de joint."

"Must be a pretty tough joint?"

"Now ye'r talkin'."

"Do any of the gang hang out there?"

"Not much. One't in er while. But it's too slum fer dem chaps, mostly, see?"

"Very well, Mickey. I thank you for this information, and if what you have told me proves to be the truth, I will do all in my power to have you acquitted."

"Tanks. Youse'll find it all gospel trut'."

"All right, Mickey. Now you may go to sleep again. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir."

With this hint as a guide, Thad at once returned to the sergeant and secured a detail of a dozen men or more.

Mounting the patrol-wagon again they drove back to the old house in Greenwich Village.

"Now, you remain here, captain," said Burr, "and I'll go in and reconnoiter."

Alone he entered the old house again, and climbed to the top, as Mickey had directed.

The place was terribly still.

There was not a sound of a living thing, and as dark as a cellar, it being the dark hour just preceding daylight.

Arriving at the top of the house, he shot the slide of his lantern and began to look about.

The first thing that caught his eye was a low, wretched looking bed in one corner of the room, in which, sound asleep, lay the old woman.

The noise of entering the place had not disturbed her slumbers, and as he had no use for her, he decided to let her sleep on.

After surveying the apartment for some moments, he finally walked over to the west end, as Mickey had directed, and there, sure enough, was the cupboard he had described.

He tried the door, and found that it was locked.

But the door was of frail wood, and he knew that he could easily break it.

He hesitated about this, however, as he did not like to arouse the old woman.

But it must be done, so he looked about for something with which to break the door.

Near the old woman's bed he found an ax.

He could not but wonder what she had been doing with an ax in her bedroom, but he took it and returned to the alleged cupboard.

A few well-directed blows splintered the door and he managed to open it.

Then he looked back at the bed to see if the old woman had been disturbed, and was surprised to see that she had not.

A suspicion came over him.

He stepped lightly to the side of the bed, and, putting down the light close to her face, examined her.

Her deadly pallor startled him, and he took her wrist and examined her pulse.

There was none.

The old woman was dead!

However, he had no time then to look further into the matter, and returned to his examination of the staircase.

Entering the door and descending a few steps, he found that it was just as Mickey had described it.

Burr then returned to the street and notified his men what he had discovered.

He also took a small detail of them and returned to the loft of the old house.

Explaining the nature of the secret stairway, he said:

"Four of you go down that stairway and follow the tunnel which you will find at the bottom till you come to a basement. This is the basement of a saloon. The chances are that our game may be in that saloon. I will take the rest of the men and go around the other way and come in the front door of the saloon. If our game is there we will have them hemmed in on all sides."

Thad found it necessary, however, to go down into the tunnel with the men before they were willing to venture.

Having explored the passage, and found it as Mickey had described it, he returned to the street, leaving the four men in the basement with instructions to come up into the saloon at a certain signal.

Burr then took the rest of the squad and went round to the saloon in Eleventh avenue.

The front door was closed, of course, and that was all the better for him.

He went to the side door, or "family entrance," as it was called, and, putting his ear to the door, listened.

The sound of voices was to be heard within.

And he thought he recognized one of them as that of his pretended friend, Laurence Sanford.

He hesitated no longer, but beckoning his men to follow him, pushed open the door and entered.

This was the moment when Laurence Sanford was about to go out.

Strange to say, George did not put his threat of taking his own life rather than being arrested, into effect, thus proving the declaration of his brother to the effect that he was a coward to be the truth.

Instead of offering any resistance, George sat there as if he had been suddenly paralyzed.

He did not so much as attempt to draw a revolver in his own defense.

Thad strode silently up to him and snapped the darbies on his wrists, and then turned to Laurence, who had stood silently but sorrowfully taking in the whole scene.

"Well, sir," began Thad, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," was the simple response.

"Then you admit that you abetted this man in escaping?"

Laurence did not answer.

"Allow me to say a word," interposed George. "Although it has the appearance of being as you state, Mr. Detective, it is not true. My brother has had nothing to do with my escape, as I am willing to swear with my last breath."

"This is all very fine," sneered Burr. "But how do you explain the fact of your both being here together?"

"Show him my confession, Larry," said George.

Laurence mechanically drew the memorandum book from his pocket, and, opening it at the point where his brother had written, showed it to the detective.

Thad read it and shook his head.

"This has very much the appearance of a conspiracy," he remarked. "I see no reason why I shouldn't take you along as well as your brother."

At this point Florence stepped up.

"Oh, Mr. Burr!" she pleaded, "if you knew Uncle Laurence as well as I do, you would not hesitate to take his word. If he says he had nothing to do with assisting Uncle George to escape, you may believe it."

"But he has not said it," objected Thad. "This is the writing of his brother, who is under arrest for attempted murder and robbery. Am I to believe him?"

"True, I have made no such statement, Mr. Burr," interposed Laurence at this point, "and I shall make none. I am guilty of trying to rescue my brother from disgrace, and as there is a God in the heavens, I would do it again! I am your prisoner."

Burr stood for a moment irresolute, and then suddenly rushing forward, grasped the honest Californian by the hand and cried:

"And you did just right! I would have done the same thing myself, and cursed be the man who would not risk as much for his own brother!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FINAL SETTLEMENT.

Burr took his prisoner and turned him over to the authorities, and was about to turn away from the Tombs when Sanford accosted him.

"Am I not to be locked up, too?" he asked.

Thad smiled.

"Not this trip, old man," he replied. "You are too honest a man to see the inside of a prison. Besides, I cannot find it in my heart to blame you for what you did. As I said before, I would have done the same thing myself, and wouldn't give a cent for a man who would do otherwise. He may be a criminal, but you cannot forget that he is your brother."

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Burr," rejoined Sanford with tears in his eyes, "and I shall not forget it. The next thing to having little Florry's money restored to her, the greatest gratification I shall have will be the remembrance of the man who brought it about. I shall always think of you as a dear friend."

"Then I am doubly paid for my efforts," said Thad, whose eyes had also grown moist.

"And I shall always remember you as one of my best friends, Mr. Burr," interposed Florence, whom they had overlooked in their burst of confidence and friendship.

"God bless you, child!" cried the great-hearted detective. "I would sooner have your friendship than that of a thousand men, because I believe it to be truer."

And yielding to the impulse, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

It was long after daylight when they left the prison, but the two men, fatigued and worn out as they were for want of sleep, were compelled to listen to the importunities of Florence, who insisted upon going down to the Crewless Craft and having the gold brought away at once.

She had a double motive for this.

First she wanted to see the great bulk of yellow metal and to know that it was all hers, and then she wanted to reward Burr and her uncle for what they had done to recover it, and especially the former, to whom she owed her life.

Therefore, after stopping at a restaurant for a little breakfast, they procured a wagon and a couple of strong men and drove once more to Old Slip.

The police were notified of their intention and dismissed, except a couple who were retained as guards for the treasure in transit, and then the party entered the queer craft and saw the laborers whom they had engaged remove the gold to the wagon.

The task was a tedious one.

The metal was very heavy and could not be removed all at once, so that small baskets had to be procured to carry it in.

At length, however, the last of it was removed to the wagon and the three friends mounted the seat.

"Where shall we take it?" asked Thad. "It ought to be taken to a bank of deposit."

"No, not now," insisted the girl enthusiastically. "Let us take it to your house and count it first. Then we can take it to a bank."

"Count it?" exclaimed Thad. "Why, child, we couldn't count it in a month."

"Well, we can count part of it, and guess at the rest."

"But it will be a great deal of trouble to take it to the house, and afterward remove it to the bank."

"Never mind. I'll bear all the expense. I may have my way for once, mayn't I?"

"I suppose you'll have to," laughed he, and the wagon drove off up-town.

They went on in silence for some time.

All three, even the detective, were more or less sad, although Florence had borne up remarkably up to that time.

At length she broke the silence.

"Poor foolish Harry! If he could only have been an honest man, how happy we would all be now! I should have given him half this gold. And now he will have none of it, and instead, spend a good part of his life in prison."

"It is unfortunate," replied Thad. "But as it was his own fault, I see no reason why your young life should be saddened by his actions. You cannot afford it."

She was thoughtful a moment, and then resumed:

"Mr. Burr, I have a request to make of you."

"What is it, my girl?"

"You are the only witness to the fact that they tried to kill me. Won't you please leave that out of your testimony when you come to testify against them?"

Thad shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see how I can do that," he answered. "The warrants upon which they are arrested include attempted murder in their charges."

"I know, but you might forget this part of it when you come to swear. They will receive sufficient punishment as it is, without the additional charge. Won't you please do this for my sake?"

It was very hard to resist her when she asked for anything in this manner.

Besides being a remarkably pretty girl, she possessed fascinating ways, peculiar to most girls, which were very hard to resist.

Still, Burr could not forget his duty.

These men had been guilty of a most heinous offense and it was only justice that they should receive the full penalty of the law.

But how was he to say no to this innocent girl, who being the principal sufferer from their wrongs, was willing to forgive?

"Well, I'll see," he finally answered.

"That won't satisfy me," she interposed quickly. "That kind of promise never means anything, because it is made to put people off. I want you to tell me that you won't remember much if anything about the poisoning."

What could he do?

Nothing, so he said:

"Very well, Florence, you have my promise."

Burr and his two friends returned to his home a silent and sad party.

Few words passed between them after Thad had promised not to testify regarding the attempted poisoning.

When they reached the house, and the two men were alone, Sanford said:

"I do not know what to make of this mystery. My brother was reported to have been murdered, and now I find him not only alive, but apparently the leader of a gang of crooks and would-be murderers. What does it mean?"

"It is all simple enough to me now," rejoined the detective. "The man that was murdered was some fellow who was substituted for your brother to cover up his tracks. As he himself said, he was dead to the world and if they had succeeded in getting away with the gold would doubtless have remained dead to all who had formerly known him. The only mystery that now remains is who the murdered man was, and we shall probably find that out now."

And he was right.

The following day Burr visited George Sanford in the Tombs.

The sharper was still cast down and silent.

For a long time he refused to talk.

It was not until after the detective had laid the case before him in plain terms, and gave him to understand that there was no hope of escape, that he consented to say anything.

"There is no use of your remaining silent now," explained the detective. "Everything is out. You were overheard by three witnesses to make incriminating disclosures about yourself and gang, and the treasure has been discovered in the hold of the boat.

Silence will do you no good, while an open confession may have the effect of making your sentence lighter."

"Do you think so?" cried the broken man eagerly.

"I have no doubt of it."

The man was silent for a long time.

He appeared to be weighing the question in his own mind.

Finally he raised his head and said:

"Well, I suppose I might as well make a clean breast of it. What do you want to know?"

"I want to know, first, who was the head of this vile conspiracy, and after that, all about the affair."

"I was at the head of it," muttered the man almost inaudibly.

"How came the others in it?"

"I will tell you. Before this business I had always been an honest man. When I drew the half million dollars, I meant as fully as I ever meant to do anything in my life, to take the money to little Florry."

"She is your niece, is she not?" interposed Burr.

"No, no relation. Though she always called me and my brother uncle."

"I see. Old friends, eh?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"As I was saying, when I drew the money I intended to bring it to Florry, but just then a man made me an offer for the rest of the property—a million and a half in gold. The offer was so good that I could not resist selling, thinking that I could invest the money to good advantage for her. And so I started from San Francisco for this city with the money."

"It was not till I reached here and saw the money taken out of the baggage-car that the devil tempted me. Instead of taking it to a safety deposit company, as I had intended, I took it to the house of my old friend, Carter, and that night we talked the matter over."

"Little by little we got to understand each other, and found that we were all agreed on one point, and that was, that we wanted the money."

"Did Florence's sister hear the conversation?"

"Yes, she took part in it."

"Was she willing that her sister should be robbed?"

"She was one of the first to propose the scheme."

"Was she also willing that her sister should be murdered?"

"That part of it wasn't brought up at that time. It was afterward, when we saw that if she did not get the money she would make trouble for us, and we saw no other way out of it but to put her out of the way."

"What did Mrs. Carter say to that?"

"She hesitated at first, but we soon persuaded her that Florry would be better off out of the way than to be rich and subject to all the temptations of an heiress."

"Then she submitted?"

"Yes, and became the foremost mover in the business."

"She must be a heartless woman."

"She is."

"One could hardly believe the sister of Florence capable of such a thing."

"People will do a great many things for money."

"That is true. But how did you manage about the dead man? Who was he, and how did you come to murder him?"

"We did not murder him."

"What?"

"I will explain."

"Please do."

"When our plans were all arranged, we looked about for an appropriate place to conceal the gold. Carter knew of this old rookery where you found us, and knew the hunchback and the old man who occupied it. They owned the old boat where the money was afterward discovered, and had used it for a long time as a fence in which to store stolen goods. We made arrangements with the old man to occupy part of the house and store the gold there, agreeing to give him a share of the wealth."

Besides himself and the hunchback, there was another man who lived with him. He was about my own age and bore a striking resemblance to me.

"This man, whose name was Munson, knew nothing about the deal between the old man and myself until we brought the gold to the house. Indeed, he had been away and was not expected back so soon. He came back, however, sooner than was expected, and as soon as he discovered what was going on, demanded a share of the gold. The old man refused him at first, and a quarrel ensued. They ultimately made it up, however, and the old man agreed to divide with him. They then decided that it would be better to transfer the gold to the secret compartment of the boat, and they started down to look at the boat and see if it was in proper condition to receive the gold. On the way they quarreled again, it seems, and the old man's passion getting the better of him, he drew a revolver and shot Munson dead.

"The old man saw the mistake he had made soon after and became so nervous over the matter that he decided to flee the city, which he did.

"Fortunately for us, the police never discovered who the murdered man was, and so it passed. The old man and the other were both out of our way, and everything would have gone on all right if it had not been for you."

"I interfered with your arrangements, though," laughed the detective.

"You did," growled the Frisco Sharper sullenly.

"It was not you whom I saw in company with Harry Disdale that night, then?"

"No; it was the old man."

"How did you come to adopt the disguise which you did?"

"Why, the people in the neighborhood had been accustomed to seeing the old man come and go, and were in terror of him, so I thought by disguising myself to look like him, I would still keep them in awe of me and prevent inconvenient questions."

"Was the old man a doctor?"

"Yes, and I pretended to be one."

"An ingenious device, truly. But there is another thing I desire to ask you."

"What is it?"

"The first time I visited the old boat I found a number of dead bodies in the cabin. Where did they come from and why were they put there?"

"That is easily explained. You see, these fellows, in addition to their business of robbing and concealing plunder for other thieves, carried on a business of buying and disposing of subjects for purposes of dissection. This was a portion of their stock."

"Are the bodies still in the boat?"

"No, they were taken away the same night you saw them there."

"How did they manage to get them away without observation?"

"They were taken out, as they were brought there, in small boats. This was easily done, for as I said, everybody about the slip was in mortal dread of the boat, which they called the Crewless Craft."

"I soon discovered that. Even the police about there were afraid to go near it."

"So they were, and therein lay our hope of security. If we had removed the gold there sooner and got the boat away, the chances are we would not have been caught."

When Burr left the prison he procured another warrant, that for Mrs. Carter, and a short time afterward placed her under arrest also.

He then returned home, where Sanford and Florence were anxiously awaiting his coming.

"Well, what did you find out?" was Sanford's first question.

"Everything necessary for the solution of the great mystery and the punishment of the instigators of the horrible plot."

He then went on to relate the particulars of what the reader has already heard, and concluded by saying:

"It is the most remarkable case I ever had anything to do with. In all my career as a detective I never ran across a lot of people who were so utterly void of feeling."

"And yet, so far as I know," added Sanford, "they were all honest people before this affair."

"So it seems, but I guess they had it in them, and only awaited the opportunity to develop it."

"And my sister?" interjected Florence timidly. "What is to be done with her?"

"That I cannot tell," rejoined the detective. "She is under arrest the same as the others, and it remains to be seen what the court will do with her."

"Poor Polly," sighed Florence. "I could never have believed her capable of such a thing."

"I either," added Sanford. "She always appeared to be a gentle creature."

"She was. No one could have been kinder than she was to me."

When Florence's gold was removed to a bank, she rewarded Burr handsomely, and Superintendent Byrnes complimented him on his remarkable success in running down the Frisco Sharper, and solving the mystery of the Crewless Craft.

THE END.

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